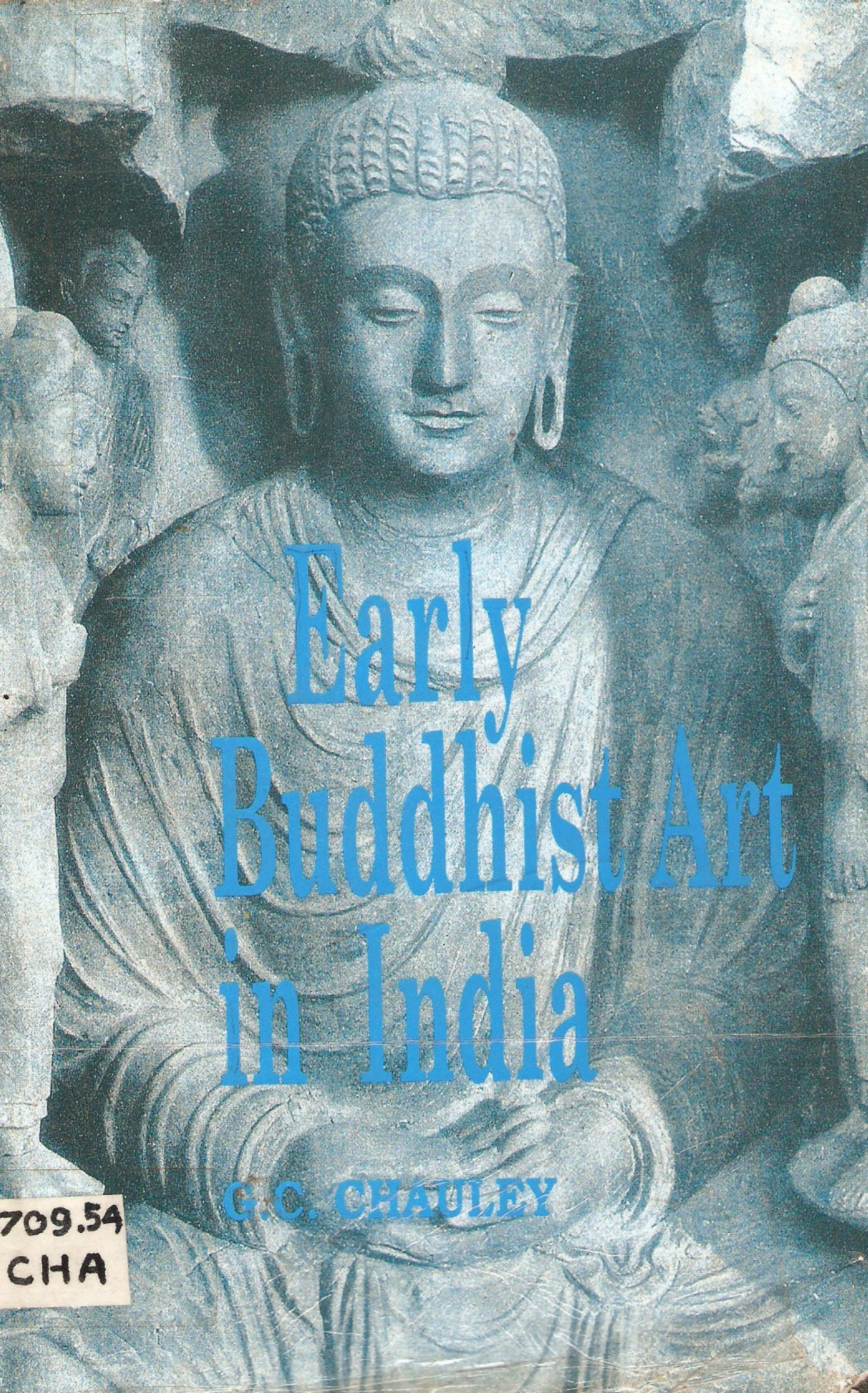
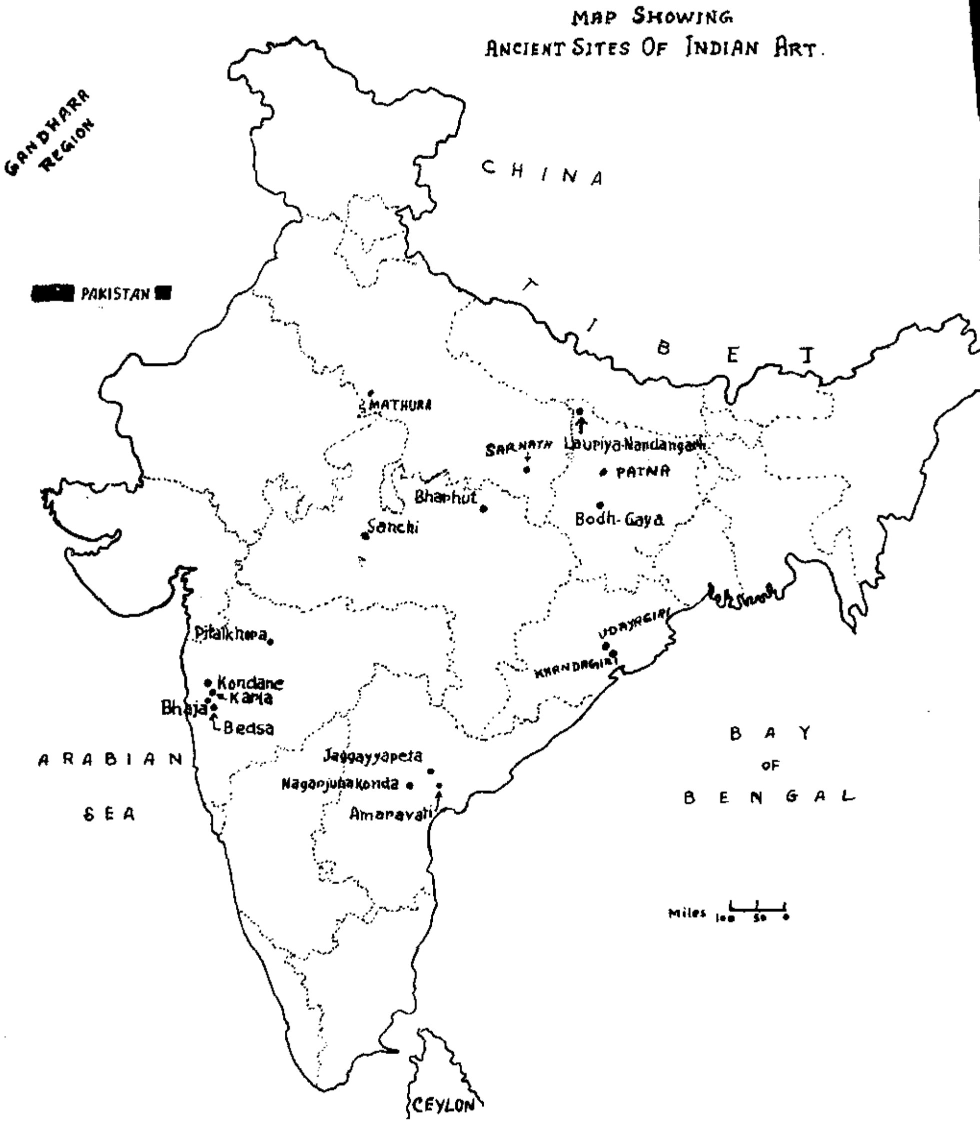


Early Buddhist Art in India

G.C. CHAULEY


MAP SHOWING
ANCIENT SITES OF INDIAN ART.
GANDHARA REGION
PAKISTAN
C H I N A
T I B E T
MATHURA
SARNATH
Lauriya-Nandangarh
PATNA
Bharhut
Bodh-Gaya
Sanchi
Pitalkhora
Kondane
Karla
Bhaja
Bedsa
UDAYAGIRI
KHANDAGIRI
A R A B I A N
S E A
Jaggayyapeta
Nagarjunakonda
Amaravati
B A Y
OF
B E N G A L
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CEYLON

EARLY BUDDHIST ART IN INDIA

(300 B.C. to 300 A.D.)

G.C. CHAULEY

SUNDEEP PRAKASHAN
NEW DELHI

First Published : 1998

ISBN : 81-7574-006-X

Published by : SUNDEEP SINGHAL FOR
SUNDEEP PRAKASHAN
POST BOX 2647, 6191/1,
DEV NAGAR, KAROL BAGH,
NEW DELHI - 110 005.
PH : 5718903, 5734149
FAX : 91-11-5783694

Composed by : **AESTHETIC**, 5783900, NEW DELHI-110005

Printed by : **NEW GIAN OFFSET PRINTERS**, NEW DELHI

Dedicated

in the Sacred Memory of my Father

Late Dasarathi Chauley

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

It gives me pleasure to introduce the present monograph *Early Buddhist Art in India* by Dr. G.C. Chauley to the academics and the layman interested in Indian art. Dr. Chauley has restricted his narrative to the time-frame, 300 B.C. – 300 A.D., covering art activities during the Maurya and Gupta periods as well as the ages of the political dominations of the Kuṣāṇas and the Satavahanas. He has not lost sight of the ramifications of the major art trends which were in view during the Maurya and Gupta culture-epochs and has rightly stressed the importance of the folk idioms which were not only existing alongside these major styles, but also on occasions imperceptibly fused with them, thus resulting in the growth and development of what is known as Early Indian Art. Indeed, the interaction between the hieratic and folk-tribal art-styles was and still is a striking phenomenon in the field of Indian art. And hence Indian art has always been vibrant and dynamic.

An avid student of Indian art, Dr. Chauley has already made his mark as a competent archaeologist and his contributions to the archaeology and conservation programmes of monuments relating to Orissan past have already received due recognition. This small book, the first of its kind from the facile pen will hopefully establish his reputation as an author. And I recommed it to all those who are eager to have an idea of the formative phase of Indian Art.

KALYAN KUMAR DASGUPTA

PREFACE

Ever since I began studying Art and Architecture of India, it appears to me that only after going through the volumes of noted writers *viz.* Vogel, Fouch, Dr. Coomarswamy, Fergussion, Dr. N.R. Ray, Burgess, Dr. S.K. Saraswati etc. one could form an idea of the artistic traditions of early India, nourished and nurtured right from the times of Mauryas till the beginning of the Gupta Era. The subject of early Indian art-history is so fascinating, that it inspired me to bring out a small monograph on the subject for the convenience of the students and beginners in the field of art, in the form of a hand book, so that by reading it, one could easily form an outline of the gradual development of the Indian Art from its incipient growth from the days of Indus or Harappan Civilization and the gradual spread of Indian Art all over the country, experimenting simultaneously to give a proper shape or destiny to the lithic art-traditions of India. Since early history of India is flooded by the spread of Buddhism, the Indian Art-history or Art-movement got a sound footing only after the significant religious developments in the 6th century B.C. *i.e.* Buddhism and Jainism. The veneration and devotion to Buddha evoked in the hearts of his followers and its profound influences had resulted in crystalising Indian Art and Architecture. Every incident of his life was carved on stone in the form of sculptures and paintings and every spot associated with him was immortalised by the construction of *stupa* or *tumuli.* The basic art forms are nurtured in the important early Buddhist centres *viz.* Patna, Mathurā, Sañcī, Bodhgayā, Kārle, Bhājā, Pitalkhorā, Amarāvatī and Nāgārjunakoṇḍa etc. The peculiarity of origin and evolution of art form popularly known as early Indian narrative art centres round the Buddhist establishments is an epoch-making incident in the history of Indian art. The Indian master-craftsmen have had centuries of experience in creative art on

wood, bamboo, ivory, clay and rarely on stones (Indus) etc., but none in shaping stones as medium for such art forms, prior to the advent of the Mauryas. The Mauryan court-artists having the proficiency in shaping stones experienced in the North-Western parts beyond the borders of India, were employed by Mauryan court and they left behind a few specimen popularly known as Mauryan art. Surprisingly the court-art never won or conquered the heart of the common masses. As a result, after the downfall of the Maurayans, the beginning of the Indian art makes its footing with age old wood and ivory techniques and devoted to use stone as medium of art form. The great works of art were created in the form of gateways of Sāñcī, railings of Amarāvatī, Bhārhut and Bodhgayā and caves at Kārle, Bhājā and Pitalkhorā, but inspite of lavish use of stones one could feel them as a wooden prototype. Though huge blocks of stones were used to carve and manifest the then Indian civilizations, customs, traditions, men and women, costumes, jewellery, religions, flora and fauna, it may not be an exaggeration of facts if termed as Varitable Museum of Art. It is interesting to note that though this art is naturalistic in conception, the Buddha is not represented in human form, only certain symbols, such as foot prints, trees, umbrella and begging bowl convey his presence. The presence of Yakṣas, Nāgas and Caitya-vṛikṣas show that Buddhism was gradually absorbing popular beliefs within its fold. This was inevitable as it was to gain a foot hold among the common people who worshipped spirits, tree and water since ancient times. The varieties of art are most noteworthy having a humble beginning with a two dimensional forms, gradually moving on to three dimensional aspects and within three to four hundred years of continuous efforts the artists and master craftsmen to attain their climax at Mathurā, paving the way for the beginning of the classical Art of the Guptas. The Gupta Art at Mathurā and Sārnāth with perfection in anatomy and in manifestation of large numbers of icons with varieties of iconographical feast covering both Buddhist and Brahmanical pantheons bespeak of the culmination of the concept developed in the previous centuries.

I shall glad, if this monograph proves useful to students and readers.

I am deeply beholden to my wife Smt. Sandhya Chauley and Shri Amal Ray for their constant inspiration and help for preparing this monograph.

My thanks are due to the Director General, Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi, for permission to use the photographs for the purpose of illustrations.

My thanks are due to my colleagues Dr. R.C. Agarwal, Dr. T. Satyamurty, and Shri. S.K. Chatterjee for their encouragements and help.

I am thankful to Shri. B.C. Mohanty for typing and manuscript.

I convey my thanks to Shri Sundeep Singhal of Sundeep Prakashan, for undertaking the publication of this work in its present form.

Last but not the least, I express my sincere gratitude to Prof. Dr. K.K. Dasgupta, "Bageswari Professor of Fine Arts", Department of Ancient Indian History and Culture, Calcutta University, who had taken pains to go through the manuscript and add a brief yet valuable forward to it.

G.C. Chauley
Bhubaneshwar

LIST OF PLATES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Indian Art-history has a hoary antiquity. With the discovery of the Indus culture, the beginning of Indian civilizations have been pushed back to at least three millennium B.C. The Indus Valley or the Harappan culture has bequeathed to us relics, few in number but varied in nature, marked with diverse kind of treatment. Many of them can undoubtedly be classed as art-objects of high order with matured tradition and experience of centuries behind them. The Harappan art primarily represented by the reliefs on the seals, figures, and sculptures in the round and terracotta figurines discovered at Harappa, Mohenjodaro and other sites in the Punjab, Sind, Baluchisthan and further north and east, are highly developed and sophisticated, expressing most frankly and significantly the cultural-ideology of the people, urbanised in habits probably with a feudal socio-economic organisation. It is surprising that it has not left any direct impact on the art-traditions of later period of Indian history. This is therefore a big hiatus, separating the artistic expression of the proto-historic phase with that of the early historic phase represented by the

Mauryān period. It is not unlikely that there was some kind of continuity in the motifs, some of which could be seen on the early coinage of India.

With the exception of some representations of human and animal figures on the 'punch-marked' coins and a few crude renderings of dancing figures on the post-Harappan Chalcolithic pottery, we have no significant specimen of any pre-Mauryan art. Next in importance is Gold Tablet, perhaps belonging to the early Mauryan epoch. This curious object illustrates a naked woman standing on her legs in symmetrical rigidity, with exaggerated hips and sexual organs, heavy and clumsy ornaments and in a rigidly angular composition found near Lauriyā and identified wrongly by Bloch, the explorer, as the Earth Goddess datable to 8th or 7th Century B.C. But literary references and art objects belonging to later epochs appear to indicate the existence of plastic practices in such impermanent materials as wood, clay, ivory etc., no remains of which are extant due to the ravages of time and the perishable nature of the material used.

It has already been discussed above that the records of the artistic achievement of any period before the 3rd century B.C. seem to be very scanty. The Indian art-history or art-movement got a sound footing only after the significant religious development in the 6th century B.C. *i.e.* Buddhism and Jainism, which were served by the artists of the later times. The profound influence which Buddha exercised over his followers and the veneration and devotion he evoked in their hearts are almost unparalleled. Every incident of his life, real or legendary, mentioned in the text was recorded in terms of sculpture and painting and every spot associated with him was immortalized and turned into a centre of pilgrimage.

Indian history assumes a more or less continuous character with the sixth century B.C. Politically, the period marked the emergence of bigger states out of the tribal political organisations of the earlier times. Inspired by ideals of universal suzerainty, these states (*Mahājanapadas*) began a contest for empire-building which ultimately culminated in the establishment of the hegemony of Magadha over practically the whole of India. Chandragupta Maurya crushed the strong kingdoms of the North-West Frontier, such as that of the Pauravas, with the help of his Macedonian army, which had facilitated him to extend Magadhan Empire upto North-West. Though Greek control over the Punjab and Sindh lasted for barely a few years, he established a contact between India and the West which continued to bear fruit for many years after his empire had broken up.

Chandragupta successfully asserted his claim on Asia and Arachosia (Afghanisthan) as well as on the whole of north-west India. His son Bindusāra extended it upto Deccan and in or about 273 B.C. bequathed the imperial sceptre to his son, Aśoka, the third and most renowned sovereign of the Maurya Dynasty. He began a similar career of conquest with a successful war against Kaliṅga, but however repulsed by the honour and bloodshed caused by war, became a convert of Buddhism and sought universal spiritual conquest through the teachings of the *Dhamma*. For forty-one years (273-232 B.C.) Aśoka ruled his immense empire with great power and might maintaining friendly relations with his neighbours, the Tamil states of extreme south and with the island kingdom of Ceylon and more remote Greek Monarchies of Macedone, Epirus, Western Asia, Egypt and Cyrene.

As a staunch supporter of Buddhism, he tried his level best to reach the message of *Tathāgata* among the subjects not only in his own empire but in the neighbouring countries also. For the said purpose he chose stone pillars and rocks for inscribing *edicts*, bricks for the construction of *Stūpas* and thus ushered the beginning of lithic art in India which are still extant in different parts of our country in the form of pillars, capitals, rock-cut caves etc., and are designated as Mauryan Art.

The fact remains therefore that we have no examples extant of either sculpture or architecture that can definitely be labelled chronologically as pre-Mauryan. Indeed, all evidences suggest that whatever specimens of two branches of visual art we know of are the direct products of the Maurya court.

CHAPTER 2

MAURYAN SCULPTURAL ART

The earliest stone sculptures of historical India are probably the sand stone victory pillars, set up by the Mauryan emperors in different parts of their extensive empire, some of which were inscribed with moral *edicts* by Aśoka, the great Mauryan Emperor. The most important sculptural remains of the Mauryan period are the capitals and crowning animal figures which provide an excellent evidence of sculptural art, both in relief and in the round between 250 B.C. to 232 B.C.

The capital of each pillar like the shaft was monolithic, comprising three principal members, namely a Persepolitan bell, abacus, and crowning sculpture in the round. The junction between the shaft and the abacus was marked by a necking, the edge of the abacus was decorated with bas-relief designs and the crowning sculpture was occasionally a sacred symbol, such as a wheel, or more commonly a symbolical animal or group of animals. Sometimes the inanimate and animal symbols were combined within the limits thus allowing the artists considerable latitude and in

consequence the surviving capitals vary widely in detail. The abacus might be either rectangular or circular so as to suit the form of the sculpture above. The edge of the abacus of the beautiful Lauriyā-Nandangarh pillar is decorated by a row of flying sacred geese in quite low relief. The abacus of the pillars at Allahabad and Sāṅkisā and the Bull-Pillar at Rāmpurvā, exhibit elegant designs composed of the lotus and palmetto or honey suckle. 'The bull from Rāmpurvā is probably the most effective early representation of the animal, subsequent to the seals of Mohenjodāro[1]. Whatever device selected, it is invariably well executed, and chiselled with that extraordinary precision and accuracy which characterise the workmanship of the Mauryan Age, and have never been surpassed in Athens or elsewhere'.

The top most sculpture in the round was most often one of the four animals viz., the elephant, the horse, the bull, and the lion. All these animals except the horse, are actually found on the round on extant capitals and it is recorded that a horse once crowned the pillar at



FIG. 1 - Animals from Sarnath Lion-Capital.



FIG. 1 - Animals from Sarnath Lion-Capital.

Rummindei, the Lumbini garden. On the sides of the abacus of the Sārnāth capital all the four creatures are carved in bas-relief (Figure 1.).

The elephant of the Sāṅkisā capital is well modelled, but unfortunately has been badly mutilated. The two pillars at Rāmpurvā bear respectively the bull and lion. (Pl. 1).

It would be difficult to find in any country an example of such ancient animal sculpture, superior or even equal to this beautiful work of art, which successfully combines realistic modelling with idealistic dignity, and is finished in every detail with perfect accuracy. The bas-reliefs on the *abacus* are as good in their way as the noble lions in the round. The design, while obviously reminiscent of *Asyrian* and *Persian* proto-types, is modified by Indian sentiment, the bas-reliefs being purely Indian. Sir John Marshall's conjecture that the composition may be the work of an Asiatic Greek is not supported by the style of the relief figures. The ability of an Asiatic Greek to represent Indian animals so well may be doubted.

The best known of all '*Mauryan Capital*' is that of the pillar of *Sārnāth*, one of the later examples was executed late in the reign between 242 to 232 B.C. Here for the first time we find four lions grouped together, instead of a single figure as in the earlier examples (Pl. - 2). This capital consists of an inverted lotus with gently carved petals. Above it is a round abacus on which are carved in high relief a lion, a galloping horse, an elephant and a bull, separated from each other by a wheel. These animals represent the four-points of the compass, the lion-North, the horse-South, the elephant-East and the Bull-West, as the Buddhists considered them the guardians of the four cardinal points. They are supported in this abacus, to give

an idea of continuous movement, symbolizing the unceasing progress of the *Dharma-Cakra* or wheel of the law, destined to spread throughout the world. On the abacus there are four seated lions, back to back, magnificently modelled. The rippling curls of the mane and upturned whiskers are conventionalized, so also is the shape of the lips, yet there is reality in the snarling mouth and beared frings. The leg-muscles and the paws are powerfully modelled, the curved claws seem to express all the native ferocity of the animal, originally the lions supported a *Dharma-Cakra*, the remains of which are still seen on the back of the animals. These splendid figures show a highly advanced form of art, which could only have been the result of long experience, the entire conception is conventional and sophisticated. This 'lion capital' of Sārnāth is now the emblem of the Indian Republic.

The only rival to the artistic supremacy of the "Sārnāth Capital" is the replica which once crowned the detached pillar Sāñcī engraved with a copy of the Sārnāth. The Sāñcī is decidedly inferior to that of Sārnāth, but it is possible that both works might have proceeded from the hands of a single artist. A century or so later, when an inferior sculptor attempted to model similar lions on the pillars of southern gate-way at Sāñcī, he failed utterly, and his failure supports the theory that the Sārnāth Capital must have been wrought by a foreigner. The 'lion capital' from Sārnāth is purely Persian in its stylised feature (C. Sivaramamurty—Sculpture in India). Certainly no later sculpture in India attained such high excellence.[2]

The perfection of the Sāñcī and Sārnāth lions, on the *Edict*-pillars, must have been the result of much progressive effect. The uninscribed pillar at Bakhirā seems to be one of

the earlier experiments of Aśoka's artists. The clumsy proportions of the shaft contrast unfavourbaly with the graceful design of the Lauryā-Nandangarh column, which bears a copy of the pillar-Edicts and may be dated back to 242 or 241 B.C., while the seated lion on the summit is by no means equal to the animals on the *edict*-pillars of Sārnāth and Sāñcī erected between 242 and 232 B.C. As per V.A. Smith, the Bakhirā-column was set up soon after 257 B.C., the date of the earliest Rock-Edicts. It must also be noted that at Rāmpura there are two pillars, only one of which is inscribed in the Sāsārām inscription and it is clearly stated that Edicts are to be inscribed on rocks, or on pillars where-ever a stone pillar is standing, which suggests that some of these pillars may considerably antedate to Aśoka's reign.

All *Mauryan* capitals as well as the columns, were chiselled out of grey sand stone of *Cunār*, and have a lustrous polish (a typical *Mauryan* style).

The frieze of elephants on the facade of the Lomaśa *Ṛiṣi* cave on the slopes of the Bārābār hill near Gayā in Bihar, presents another fine artistic composition of the Mauryas. 'There is a close similarity between the Bhita Terracotta-Elephant on the one hand and the elephant of the facade of the Lomaśa Ṛiṣi cave at Bārābār and the elephant in the frieze around the abacus of the Sārnāth-lion-capital on the other hand[3].

Strength and majesty were the hall-mark of Mauryan institution and they are seen at best in monuments of Mauryan art. In this period we meet with two styles, which may be clearly distinguished *viz.* court-art as evident in building of the city of *Pāṭaliputra*, the Assembly Hall of Chandragupta and numerous monuments of Aśoka. The

other was a *folk-art* tradition marked by some clay figurines, but more conspicuously by a group of free-standing statues of colossal *yakṣha* and *Yakṣhīs* found at Mathurā, Vidiśā, Vārāṇasī, Pāṭaliputra and Śiśupālagarh in Orissa. (Pls. 3 & 4).

This folk-art had greater influence on the further development of Indian art than the former. An interesting specimen of this folk-art is the elephant of *Dhauli* in Orissa. The forepart of an elephant is hewn out from a rock on which are carved the *edicts* of Aśoka. It shows a remarkable sense of plastic feeling in the representation of living flesh rendered with great naturalism and knowledge of the animal *physiognomy* (Pl. 5).

Some *Yakṣha* and *Yakṣhī* statues have been found carved in the same grey sand stone of Cunār and were thought to belong to Aśokan period. Here we see the same difference in execution. The *chauri-bearer* from Didārgañj is a splendid monolith representing feminine grace most eloquently. The slight stoop owing to the fullness of the breasts and attenuated waist on broad hips recalling the famous lines of Kālidāsa, '*Sokanamra Stanabhyam*' slightly bent by the weight of her breasts and *śroṇi* bharad alasagamana of slow gait by the burden of her hips is indeed another fine example of Mauryan study of human form[4]. It reflects a more sophisticated art and may be of later date, while the *Pārkhām-Yakṣa* reflects an almost primitive crudeness. In its conception it is entirely Indian and it can be taken as the proto-type of the later representations of the Buddha and Boddhisattva during Kuṣāṇa and Gupta period.

The origin of the Mauryan court-art is a much disputed subject, but scholars agreed that is reflects influence of Iran

and the western Hellenistic powers. But whatever the foreign elements of ancient Indian art may have been, great weight must be allowed for the personal initiative of Aśoka, a man of marked originality, with a mind capable of turning large designs and executing them with imperial thoroughness. The discretion taken by Indian art was like the diffusion of Buddhism, determined in its main lines by the will of a resolute and intelligent autocrat.

With all its urban, conscious and civilised quality, its advanced power of visualisations and full comprehension of the third dimension, Maurya court-art constitutes but an episode in the history of Indian art. Dr. Kramrisch rightly states the position when she says that "in the organism of Indian art, Mauryan sculpture has only marginal importance". It was indeed a plant reared up by the will, care and patronage of a court heavily under the influence of the contemporary international culture and ideology of the Asiatic West and Mediterranean East. In course of time the glass walls fell to pieces and the plant withered[5]. Maurya court art failed to make any notable contribution to the growth of Indian art except that it directly helped the dictation of the later in permanent material.

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2. V.A. Smith—*History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon.*
3. C.C. Dasgupta—*Origin & Evolution of Indian Clay Sculptures.*
4. C. Sivaramamurty—*Indian Sculpture*, p. 18.
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CHAPTER 3

POST-MAURYAN SCULPTURAL ART

The dismemberment of the Mauryan empire was brought about by a reaction promoted by the *Brāhmaṇas*, and the assassination of the last Mauryan monarch by Puṣyamitra Śuṅga. There can be no doubt that the government and its administration weighed heavily on the subject and they resented it, which has its concrete evidence on the contemporary art also.

This period is an epoch of great sculptural achievement. Freed from the over powering influence of the court, the art reached a large section of the people and the zeal for the new religion found expression, in remarkable artistic achievements which represent an indigenous artistic movement—a continuation of the ancient heritage of Indus Valley art. "Indeed, Śuṅga Art, formally and spiritually is practically a negation of all that Maurya art stands for; they are different in motive and direction, in their form, technique and significance"[1].

The artistic movement in the early classical phase was widespread throughout the country, having prolific centre of activity, both in the north as well as in the south. In the

north the main activity is recognised in the Madhyadeśa at Bhārhut, Sāñcī, Bodhgayā, Mathurā etc. In the East there was a regional movement in Kaliṅga, *i.e.* Orissa. Apart from activities at these places, artistic remains unearthed in other parts of Northern India, mark a wide and expansive movement representing the development of a common plastic tradition with the same inherent and fundamental qualities. Local and regional idioms may be recognised, but in spite of such differences in idioms and expressions, all are linked up as parts of the same general movement—the classical movement.

The art of this early period consists mostly of reliefs. It will be noticed that relief sculpture has been favoured by Indian artists in spite of their skill to do sculpture in the round. It is because this suited the needs of the Indian art. All available space in a shrine had to be utilized—wall surfaces, pillars, niches, and towers—to glorify the faith and to relate its great legends. In Buddhist shrines incidents from the *Jātakas* (the birth theories connected with the several previous lives of the Buddha) were told for the edification of the faithful. Insistent repetition of certain events, such as the enlightenment and the preaching of the doctrine, may be noticed in these. Thus, it was a simple artistic device to stress their eternal value. The spectators seeing them again and again unconsciously become aware of the great truth, its compelling urgency and its omnipresence.

Bharhut

The subjects represented in the Bharhut sculpture include about twenty *Jātaka* scenes, half a dozen historical scenes, more than thirty statues in high relief of *Yakṣa* and *Yakṣiṇīs, Devatās* and *Nāgarājās*, one half of which are

inscribed with their names and representations of animals and trees, horse-chariots and bullock-carts, besides several kinds of musical instruments and a great variety of flags, standards and other symbols of royalty. About one half of the full Medallions of the cross-bars, and all of the half medallions of the pillars are filled with flowered ornaments of singular beauty and delicacy of design. The sculptures may be classified as follows:

(A) *Yakṣas, Devatās, Nāgas, Apsarās,* (B) Royal persons, religious persons, (C) Animals, (D) Trees and fruits, (E) Scene from *Jātaka* stories, Historical scenes; Humourous scenes, (F) objects of worship like *stūpa*, wheel, *Bodhi-tree*, Footprints etc.[2]

"Serving as a vehicle of communication according to the needs of an expanding religion, the art in this early period is mainly narrative, following the early practice of continuous narration. The detailed manner of depicting a particular story or an event leads to the presentation of the various incidents and episodes of it in one and the same relief composition. The figure of the main actor is repeatedly shown to indicate the progress of the story and the basis of connectedness is usually the locality in which the event or the story is said to have occurred. Irrespective of the time that might have separated the various incidents, they are grouped together into one synthetic unit, because they all took the chronological sequence in thus intentionally broken up in favour of a narration that centres round the location of a story of an event. Time factor is thus regarded as of no import and is eliminated altogether"[3].

When the story was told in a single panel, all the important incidents were depicted in it, giving a complete picture of the whole story at a glance. The principal

characters were represented as many times as required to cover the main incidents. This method is best and made clear by an illustration of the medallion depicting the *Ruru-Jātaka* at Bharhut (Pl. - 6).

The Buddha, in one of his previous birth was a compassionate deer with the name of Ruru. Once, on seeing a merchant floundering in a stream, the deer leaped into the stream, took the merchant on its back and swam ashore. But the merchant was a vicious and greedy person. Having escaped danger, it occurred to him that he could win a big reward by helping the king of Benāras to catch this fine animal. With treachery in his heart, he cleverly led Ruru deep into the forest where the king happened to be hunting, leaving the unsuspecting Ruru near the scene of the hunt on some cleaver pretext, the merchant joined the king to whom he described the great virtue of this rare animal. The king was pleased at the prospect of hunting the deer. Reaching the glade where Ruru was grazing, the king aimed his arrow at the deer but Ruru, to the great surprise of everyone present forbade the king to shoot at him. While the astonished king stayed his hand, the miraculous deer admonished him on the duties of virtuous life.

The three successive episodes are represented on the same round panel. In the lower part of the medallion the deer swims towards the shore leaving the merchant it had saved. The forest is represented by a clump of trees in the midst of which the herd moves.

At the extreme right of the medallion the treacherous merchant, having brought the king near the herd, points out Ruru to the king and the king aims the arrow.

In the centre of the medallion we see the last episode, the deer is seen lying down and addressing the king, who is

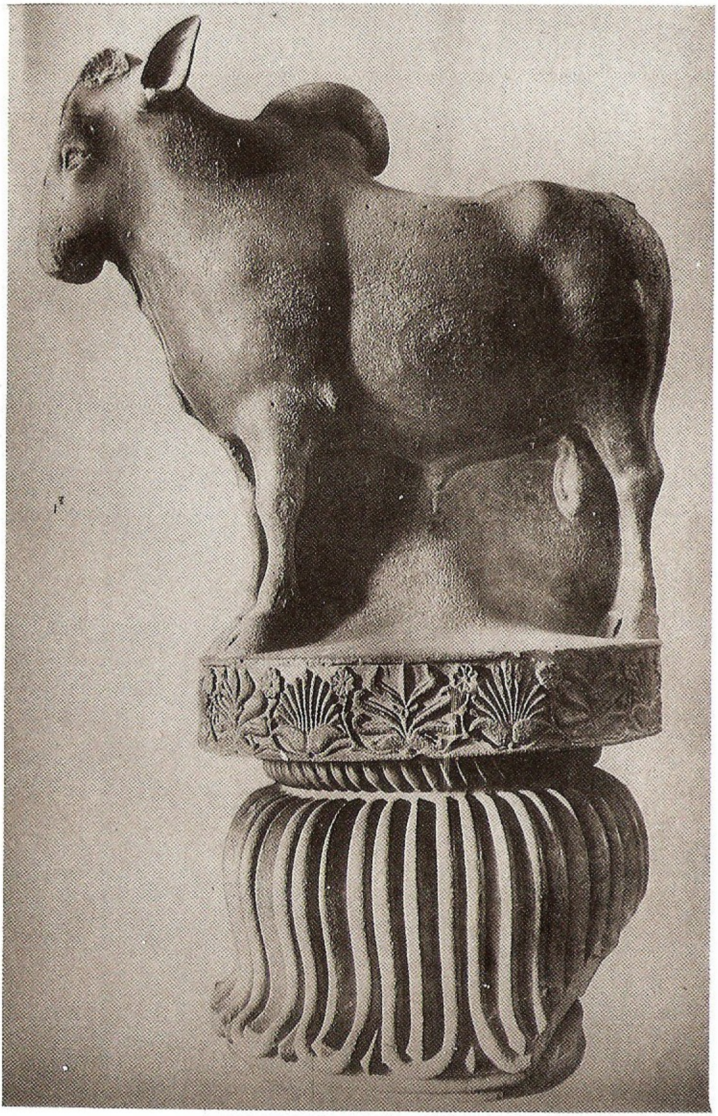


Plate 1

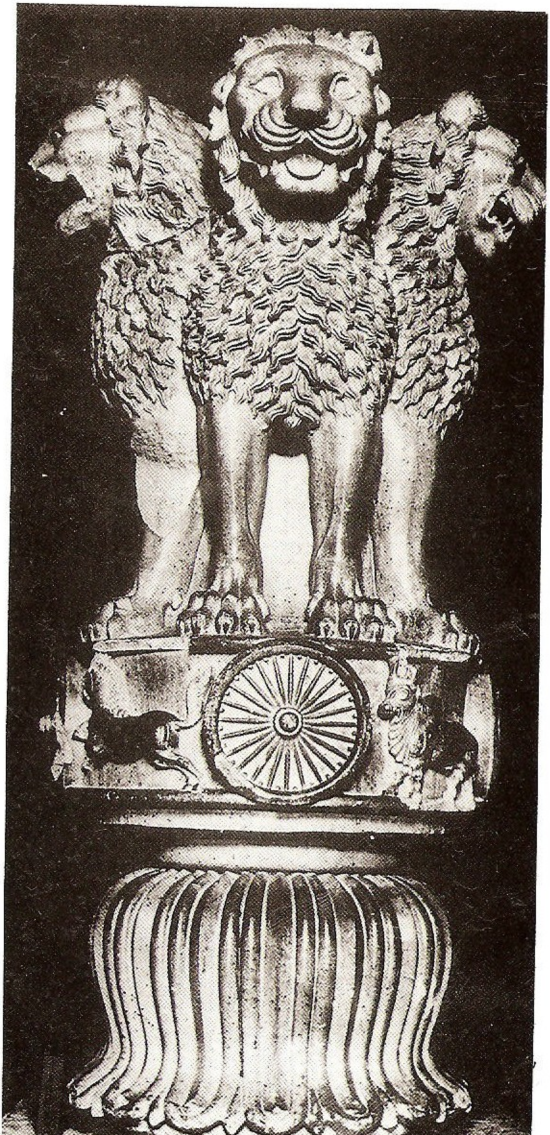


Plate 2



Plate 3



Plate 4



Plate 5

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Plate 6



Plate 7

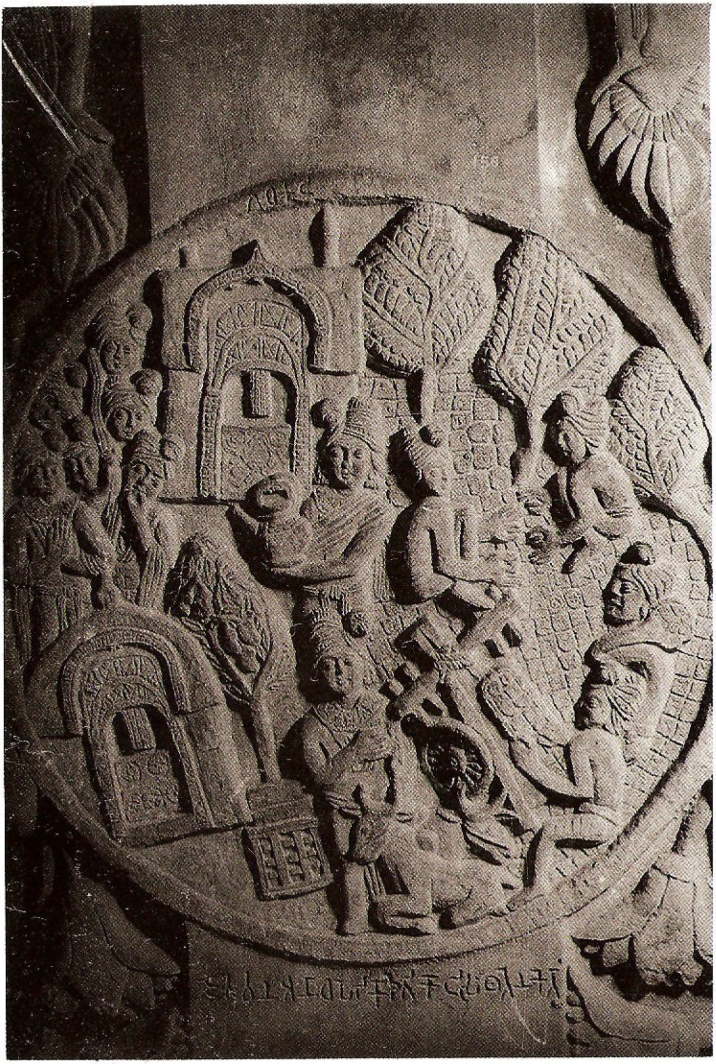


Plate 8

listening with awe and admiration to the eloquent speech of the deer.

Another important artistic rule adopted was in respect of perspective and size. Objects were not represented in their obvious natural relation in which near objects appear larger and distant ones smaller, but in fact the size was governed by the importance of the person represented. This was a simple but effective way of focussing attention on the importance of the object represented.

In a Bhārhut representation one of the most popular scene is the Dream of Māyā Devī, in which the mother of Buddha dreams that a white elephant comes down from the heaven and enters her womb. This was the form in which the Buddha was supposed to have come down from heaven to be born as prince Siddhārtha. The relief represents Māyā asleep on a couch and watched over by women attendants who are seated on the side of the bed. Here the Queen is depicted as much larger than her attendants including those in the fore-ground beside the elephant. Bodhisattva, who is enormous and dominates the scene, is represented as descending from above (Pl. - 7).

The purchase of Jetavana garden tells how the Buddha was given a gift of Jetavana park by the banker Anāthapiṇḍaka. The Park was the property of Prince Jeta, who consented to sell it only on condition that the purchaser give him as many gold coins as it would take to cover the ground. A single medallion depicts the two distinct part of the episode. In the right half, two men are laying the coins out on the ground. The gold has been brought in a bullock-cart, beside which stands Anātha-piṇḍaka. He is seen again, making the donation of the park to Buddha. Characteristic of ancient Indian tradition, the former holds a water pot from which he is supposed to pour

water over the hands of the recipient. But although, a number of witnesses are portrayed, the figure of Buddha has not been represented (Pl. - 8).

All these reliefs at Bharhut show us certain peculiar features which are more or less common to all early Indian sculpture. Firstly, in the beginning of Buddhism, the figure of the Buddha was never represented. His presence was implied by the use of symbols, for example, a vacant throne, an umbrella, or foot-prints, as seen in the purchase of the Jetavana garden and the descent from the Trayastriṁśa. Secondly, in depicting a story the artist paid no heed to time, hence a single relief may group together with incidents of a story which may have occurred at different times but at the same place with a repetition of the main figures as often as is necessary. Another feature of early Indian art, as seen in Bharhut, is the visualisation of the three dimensional objects, in which the objects are not depicted as they are seen, but as they actually are. The Indian artist tried to represent what he knew to be true rather than what his eyes observed, this meant that he did not observe the laws of perspective. In looking at an object we do not see it from all angles at the same time. There are parts that must remain invisible since they are out of our view. The early Indian artist, however, did not surmise the third dimension. He would tilt into view other surfaces than those that actually appeared, so as to give a full view of more than one surface. For example, in case of a throne, the top of seems to be raised in order to be seen. When a number of figures appeared in a composition, they were placed one above the other and not behind one another, as they should really have been. By this device, artist was able to bring into view figures that would, according to laws of perspective, be only partly visible or entirely hidden by the

figures in front of them. The size of the figures was not regulated by distance. The artist's chief concern was the main person or objects. Accordingly, these were represented in a size befitting their importance, without any regard for the actual proportions of the respective figures.

A most characteristic formal quality of Śuṅga art is its flowing linear rhythm that binds all isolated objects in one continuous stream of life as it were. Look at any coping stone of a railing, and one will find a huge lotus-stalk flowing in rhythmical waves from form to form, not only binding each isolated object to itself, including the limbs of human beings, but also the animals and trees with the same flowing linear rhythm. The so-called Prasenjit pillar reliefs, the scene of the *Chudamaha* festival in the Sudharma Hall, and the figures of Candra, Alakānanda and Sudarśana *Yakṣiṇī* may be cited as examples of this flowing and rhythmical linear movement[4].

But there is another trend in Bhārhut equally powerful, a trend characterized by a disregard of this flowing linear rhythm. This trend is best illustrated in such scenes as those on the so-called Ajātaśatru pillar where the figures are hard and isolated and the compositions are regulated in a schematic manner by vertical and horizontal lines (Plate - 9). It is only an agitated display of light and darkness that disturbs the otherwise static character of the scenes. The trend is equally marked in several frameless figures standing on upright posts; such are the figures of Virūdhaka-*Yakṣa*, Gāṅgeya-*Yakṣa*, Cakravāka-*Nāgarāja*, Śrīmā *Devatā* and of others. It seems however that this latter trend was gradually yielding place to the former, which means that isolated, compact and static rush of forms was progressively being subordinated; so far as

Bhārhut and Bodhgayā are concerned, to the free and rhythm of lines and swaying balance.

The railing and its gates and pillars are curiously massive, the figures of tutelary *Yakṣas, Yakṣīs, Nāgas, Vṛikṣakas* (Dryads) on the posts hardly emerge from the stone block, many are of a hieratic rigidity, though others attempt a certain movement, one leg bent, the arms detached, resting on the hip or holding the branch of a tree. The reliefs are flat, the scenes composed as if they were seen from the above, over-lapping of figures being avoided as far as possible. The figures themselves are short, often out of proportion, clad in grotesque, boorish costumes[5].

The human form which is conspicuously absent in the Mauryan art plays an important role in the art of the Śuṅgas, but it is accepted and treated merely as one of the many components of nature. Here it is completely catagorised with trees, creepers, animals and hundred and one other objects of nature, not as the main object as in the case of later Indian sculpture.

Bodhgayā

Śuṅga style reached its consummation in the great balustrade enclosing, in a vast quadrangle, the *Bodhi-Tree* and the *Caṅkrama i.e.* the first walk of the Buddha after his enlightenment at Bodh Gayā (Bihār). It was erected under the last Kāṇva king in the early 1st century B.C. The once heavy pillars and coping stones have now narrowed. They were decorated with well-modelled lotus medallions, enclosing male or female heads, or heraldic animals; the half rounded on the top of the columns bear *Jātaka*-scenes represented by a few well conceived, though still somewhat thickest figures and accessories. The columns at the gates

have rich scenes, in a likewise simplified architectural setting, some solemn, some depicting the Sun God, Śrī, the Goddess of fertility and wealth, others of a charming deity, even frivolity; or they bear the images of gods (Indra) or of *Yakṣa* or *Yakṣis.* On the whole, the carvings on the Bodhgayā rail are in the Bhārhut style, but more advanced in technique as well as in visual and consequently in plastic effect. As a result Bodhgayā is a step forward from Bhārhut. Reliefs are less crowded, all non-essentials being left out. They are abbreviated, stories are more summarily told. Descriptive labels also disappear so that it seems that the narratives were by now well-known. A comparison of the same subject—that of purchase of *Jetavana* at Bhārhut and Bodhgayā will bring out this point clearly (Pl. 10). Instead of being scrupulously exhaustive, as at Bhārhut, the Bodhgayā version is more suggestive and aesthetically more appealing. The medley of forms of the 'Ajātaśatru pillar' of Bhārhut order later paved the way for brevity and clearness, and the figures in Bodhgayā have all been brought out clearly and exhaustively. The conflict between the surface and the three dimensional extension had dissolved to a considerable extent, and the direction was now more towards the depth, figures were now shown in fuller roundity and parallel to the ground. The heaviness of form still persisted but had already shed its static weight and marked solidity. From mere definition of the body, Bodhgayā set the state to suggest that the body was warm blooded and was indeed made of soft flesh as well.

Sāñcī

The great *stūpa* at Sāñcī is the most stupendous of the early Buddhist establishment and supplies, in its splendid gateway carvings. It represents a panorama of contemporary life and civilisation with great vigour and dramatic intensity. Sāñcī is in the continuous line of

evolution from Bhārhut and Bodhgayā. Inspite of this connection, however, it indicates a definite turn from the main Bhārhut diction of flowing linear rhythm. Some of the Panels and a few individual sculptures, no doubt are endowed with the graceful lyricism of mellifluous lines, but they are only too few. The Sāñcī trend, again, is unthinkable without a reference to the earlier plastic achievements at Bhārhut. The strenuous efforts of a century has enabled the artist to achieve mastery in depth and dimensions and to regulate the conform and with this new awareness and its scope he visualize could his subjects in a manner that is quite different.

The forms burst forth from the stone, so to say, and are spread over the surface almost in endless masses reverberating the entire composition and illumined by sharp passages of darkness. The dark shades give greater relief to the forms and accentuate their vigour over the composition in bewildering and tumultuous variety. The chiaroscuro *i.e.* the rich interplay of lights and shades, and the strong feeling for volume, coupled with clear-cut outlines and multitudious angles, attitudes and poses act and react upon one another and produce vital and dramatic compositions surging with life and energy almost to the point of obstreperous frenzy. The scene of the exciting struggle, such as the war of the relics (South gate, West gate), best illustrate the epic-quality of the Sāñçī compositions.

The distinctive trend, characterised by the horizontal and vertical arrangement of the figures in the composition and first recognised on the 'Ajātaśatru pillar' at Bhārhut, reaches its climax and ultimate fruition (Pl. - 11). The human figures remain squat and sturdy, but the reserved contours gradually get softened and flew harmoniously from the shoulders to the ankles. The body now appears as

a beautiful and integrated union of the single parts, the fluid contours with their gliding sensuousness leading to a well-constituted whole, no longer shy, hesitating and faltering, but sure and lively in movement. The guardian figures at the bottom of the gateway posts and those of the *Yakṣas* over the architectures, surging with bent-up energies, now stand firm and stretch their limbs freely and surely. In the treatment of the drapery too, a greater energy is noticeable. The stiff and stylised treatment with the flat ends spread fan-wise like ironed aprons, as we see at Bhārhut, now disappears. A greater interest is taken in the weight of the garment and its changing folds, so as to free it from its subjection to the body. Though not successful everywhere, the direction taken indicates a suggestive advance on the earlier mode.

Besides these, orientalised animals played an important part in Buddhist Art (Pl. - 12). All these hybrid creatures and winged figures besides their purely decorative role have been employed in representing the inferior mythical being of the native mythology. Still it is uncommonly difficult, to find Indian names for these hybrid forms, in the formation and employment of which great inconstancy and some misconceptions are noticeable. It may be supposed that if the west Asian forms had not been preserved, this careful fashioning of extraordinary creatures, of the imagination, to which names cannot be given, must point likewise to foreign influence.

The representation of divine-being under purely human forms is a feature of native art that is opposed to these foreign influences on ancient Buddhist art, and a marked contrast to the Chimairas (*Kinnaras*) of West Asia is presented by the native animal world, which is not so

frequently met with decoratively, but leaves this role to the foreign forms[6].

According to Dr. V.S. Agrawal, The Stūpas of Bhārhut and Sāñcī serve as the two sparkling eyes of early Indian art through which we become acquainted with the rich work of ancient Indian life relating to the social, religious and artistic traditions of the people. As the two epics *i.e.* the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* are two Indian literatures, so are the *stūpas* of Bhārhut and Sāñcī veritable lithic documents of early Indian life, our knowledge of ancient Indian gods and goddesses, religious cults, manners and customs, domestic and city architectures, fashions and fancies are very much enhanced by these two immortal monumental arts of central India.

Bhārhut and Sāñcī virtually hold the key to the symbolical interpretations of Indian art. They moreover present a link between folk life and folk religion on the one hand and the higher way of the Buddha on the other.

Udayagiri and Khaṇḍagiri Cave Reliefs

The sculptures in Orissa during the second and first centuries B.C. have a provincial aspect. They mainly depend on Madhyadeśa, but to some extent also on the south. These sculptural pieces are to be seen in the caves of Khaṇḍagiri and Udayagiri near Bhubaneśwar; which constitute an important store-house of early sculpture of Kaliṅga during the time of the powerful Khāravela, a contemporary of Puṣyamitra Śuṅga, and whose exploits are narrated with great detail in the Hātīgumphā inscriptions. The subject matter of these carvings is from Jain mythology. The reliefs in the Mañcapurī cave indicate an advance on the Bhārhut idiom in the depth of the relief and plastic treatment of the figures, though the workmanship is

poorer and coarser. With the masses modelled in high relief with strong contrasts of lights and shades, there is a suggestion of vigorous actions and intense vitality which appear to link these reliefs with Sāñcī trend. But technical insufficiency results in isolated and compact figures which prevent convincing compositions. The carvings in the Ananta Gumphā (fig. 36), Khaṇḍagiri, stylistically and iconographically are reminiscent of the Bodhgayā reliefs. The two-storeyed cave, the Rāṇīgumphā, is the best decorated of all with elaborate friezers of sculptures both in the upper and lower stories, as well as a few independent figure-sculptures. A long frieze depicts the well-known story of Udayana and Vāsavadattā, popular in Jaina and Buddhist legends as well. Early forms of Sūrya, Śrī Lakṣmī and *Caitya-vṛikṣa* are presented on the doorway lintels of these caves. Dance and musical orchestra here, as at Bhārhut, present the full gamut of four-fold variety. Hunting scenes are presented with exuberant enthusiasm. A large elephant receiving offerings of lotuses from his mates in a lotus pond reminds us of Kālidāsa's description of a similar theme painted on palace walls at Ayodhyā, "*Chitradvīpaḥ Padmavana Vatirnaḥ Kareṇubhirdattamṛnalabhaṅgaḥ*"—painted elephants down in the lotus ponds receiving lotus stalks from the female ones[7].

The compositions are more vital and better integrated, and the conception of a theme and its presentation more harmonious, though the execution, however, remains comparatively coarse and lacks the smooth and clear-cut finish of the contemporary central Indian school.

Mathurā

The great age of the Kuṣāṇas though veritably the golden age for Mathurā School of Sculpture, does not by any

means represent its beginning. The tradition of the Mathurā school was already of respectable antiquity when the revival of art took place. The Early Indian School of Sāñcī, Bhārhut and Bodhgayā had an important out post at Mathurā, where remarkable parallels of the *yakṣas* and *vṛikṣakas*, dwarfs and fantastic animals, *toraṇas* and railings were being constantly wrought in considerable numbers. Dr. Coomarswami remarked that "the School of Mathurā is more nearly related to Bhārhut than to Sāñchī must go back to the middle of the second century B.C."[8].

Two fragmentary figures of *Yakṣas* of Mathurā museum with their hard lines, flattered treatment, exaggeratedly large and protruding eyes and heaviness of dress and ornaments, represent an art, perhaps slightly more mature than the Bhārhut style but less advanced and more refined conceptions of Bodhgayā. According to Dr. V.S. Agarwal: the Mathurā-*Yakṣa* images as stated by Prof. R.P. Chandra is the crudest product of the Early indian school', nevertheless they evince some genuinely aesthetic features. they should not be understood to be isolated example to an art prevailing in the 3rd and 2nd century B.C. and until now ten such big statues have been discovered from a greater horizon of Gangetic plain and of Central Asia.

Mention may be made of a treasure of exquisite pieces of sculptured-railing of a Buddhist *stūpa*, datable to early Kuṣāṇa period discovered at Sāṅghol in Pañjāb. These sculptures belong to the Mathurā School of Art on Red Sand Stone, carved in high relief depicts the figures of *Yakṣīs, Upāsakas, Śālabhañjikās* etc.

Yakṣa and Yakṣiṇi Statues

Several massive and independent sculptures, carved wholly in the round, hail from widely distant regions, such

as Parkham near Baroda and Mathurā, Besnagar and Pawa in Gwalior; Lohanīpur, Didārgañj and Patna in Bihar. They are usually described as *Yakṣas* and *Yakṣiṇīs* as it still awaits exact identification. It is strictly frontal in treatment and the modelling suffers from inadequate or insufficient technique. The sides and the back have practically no modelling except a slight chamfering. The drapery appears transparent where it clings to the body and has given flat volume where it is free.

The bulkiness and sheer volume, though crudely expressed, connect these figures with the ancient indigenous tradition and gradually this primitive quality experiences the trends and fashions of what has been described as classical Indian art. As per analytical study, the two *Yakṣa* images from Baroda and Parkham should come first. The figure of *Yakṣa Maṇibhadra* from Pawa, though usually classed with the Parkham image, exhibits a greater sense of modelling. A greater co-ordination of volumes, and naturally flowing into the other, it definitely shows a mature conception. There is nothing primitive or archaic in this figure except its heaviness. Equally free from primitiveness is the *Yakṣiṇī* figures from Dīdārgañj, which stands out as the most outstanding creation in the whole series. The full and rounded features, including the prominent breasts, narrow waist, broad hips, gradually tapering down the shapely legs, are all kept within the compactness of the whole and within a fluid contour.

A few images of *Yakṣas* of high artistic merit like that of its *Madhyadeśa* counterpart, reported from Bhubaneśwar and now preserved in Bhubaneśwar's state museum, speak of the continuity of the same art tradition and veneration in Orissa also.

In the rendering of these colossal statues, no doubt representatives of the old plastic diction of weight and volume, one may recognise the extension of two-dimensional treatment of three-dimensional depth as is evidenced from the relief composition of the period.

The *Yakṣa* problem in Indian religion, literature and art, is of dimensions worthy of special attention, perhaps no other cult is as wide-spread and as deeply ingrained in the lives of the people as the Yakṣa-cult. The right hand was shown in *abhaya-mudrā*—a divine feature, later on accepted for Buddha, *Bodhisattva* and other images. They are supposed to be the associates of Kubera, as *Yakṣa* Maṇibhadra was the master of his treasure. Wealth and immortality or long life were the two human factors which made *Yakṣa*-worship of irresistible appeal to the folk-mind, religion, literature, art and all testify to the importance of this ancient cult.

Veṅgī School (South India)

When the artistic movement of the Śuṅgas galvanized the entire history of the North and Central India, the Kṛiṣṇā-Godāvarī Delta, roughly the Veṅgī region of the South was not lagging behind. It also experienced an awakening of the artistic impulse. Marble slabs of the *stūpas* and railings of south India from Jaggayapeṭa and some from Amarāvatī belong to the second and first centuries B.C. respectively. Inspite of the stylistic connectedness of contemporary form, their linear sensitiveness is more strong and their modelling, with a minimum of means, is generous. However, not unlike, the figures on the ground balustrade, *stūpa* II at Sāñcī, those of Jaggayapeṭa frequently stand on boulsters, with their feet as if dangling and this impression is further intensified in their case by an extraordinary length

of limbs, drawn out to an unearthly slenderness. The bodies themselves, however, are as sturdy as any in *Madhyadeśa*. Yet stilted limbs, fluttering away from the figures in thin and sharp diagonals, angular movements with sustained power and a self-assurance of outline, speak of energies ethnically different from those in *Madhyadeśa* and assignable to the Drāviḍiān element.

The marble of Amarāvatī of the 1st century B.C., was already of a slightly deeper art relief, with a predilection, too, for a fuller modelling of the body. Yet never hitherto has the lotus creeper been so delicately burdened with ingenious flowers, nor were men or beasts given such tough elasticity and elegance. Subtly passionate faces carried by a delicately modelled but forcefully built body, that steps out lightly on legs with an unearthly tread, these are peculiar to Amrāvatī from now onward.

Outside the School of Veṅgī, the Śivaliṅga from Guḍimallam, North Arcot district, occupies a position of its own. Vehement in its sturdy presence, the figure, in front of it, has but little in common with those of the Veṅgī marble, except that there too the body was shown as vigorous, but this was minimised by a decisive outline and the delicacy of the flat modelling. Nor is it on the same level with the milder version of *Yakṣa* and allied figures from central India of the same phase. On the whole it belongs to 'ancient' in its possibilities with the firm pressure in the resolute manner of standing, with its tight modelling and the sightless grin, replete with the savour of its own juice, it sums up an aspect of ancient Indian art not preserved in any other monument[9].

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CHAPTER 4

CONTEMPORARY ART OF WESTERN INDIA (DECCAN)

The importance of the Deccan in the history of Buddhist monuments is supreme, for it has bequeathed to us a priceless legacy in the form of a magnificent series of caves extending over a period of more than a thousand years. The movement started at least as early as the beginning of the second century B.C., when the Buddhists of Bhājā and Ajantā excavated, out of the live trap rock of the Deccan, monumental replicas of the architectural forms. The excavation activity reached its consummation in the Gupta-Vākāṭaka period.

The number of the sites, with important caves, runs into several dozens, of which Bhājā, Bedsā, Kārle, Koṇḍane, Pitalkhorā belong to the pre-christian era. Another prospective site is Pauni (Distt. Bhandara), 56 miles from Nāgpur excavated by Dr. S.B. Deo, proved to be very potential Buddhist site consisting of railings, pillars, statues, etc. From the style of these reliefs and the palaeography of the dedicatory inscriptions on two of the

uprights and the coping, it is abundantly clear that the railing belonged to about 2nd century B.C.

Bhājā:

During this early period the traditions of Buddhist art percolating through the kingdom of the Sātavāhanas travelled also to Western India while in old Gorges and cliffs along the steep *Ghāṭas*, a regular development of the technique of rock-cut chambers was already in progress. The caves at Bhājā, near Poona, are among the earliest of the series. In one of the Vihāra (monastery) caves we have some interesting relief-sculptures, which could roughly be atributed to the same period as the Sāñcī reliefs. But in their powerful naturalism and treatment of certain motifs, like male and female head-dresses, suggest stylistic affinities with the art of Bhārhut. In the handling of compositions of crowded figures and in their relatively much freer movements, the sculptures even indicate an advance over the Bhārhut traditions, but they appear curiously clumsy when compared to the contemporaneous Sāñcī-reliefs.

Among the Bhājā-sculptures, the two most famous are the representations of Sūrya (Sun) and Indra, carved on either side of the doorway of a Vihāra (Pl. - 13). The Sun is depicted as roding on a four-horse chariot across the sky, trampling over two grotesque female figures described as amorphous powers and darkness; Indra is shown as sitting on his mighty elephant Airāvata, striding majestically and vigorously over an archaic landscape. Although Sūrya and Indra are vedic deities, their presence in the Buddhist monasteries can only be explained by the fact that here they appear as symbols of the Buddha's spiritual and temporal power. But the main interest of these reliefs lies in the



Plate 9



Plate 10

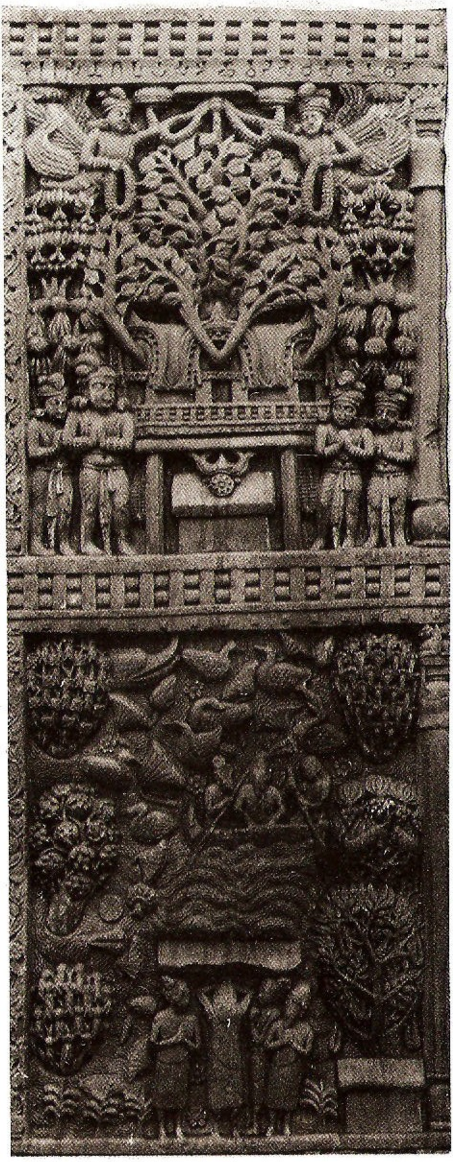


Plate 11



Plate 12



Plate 13

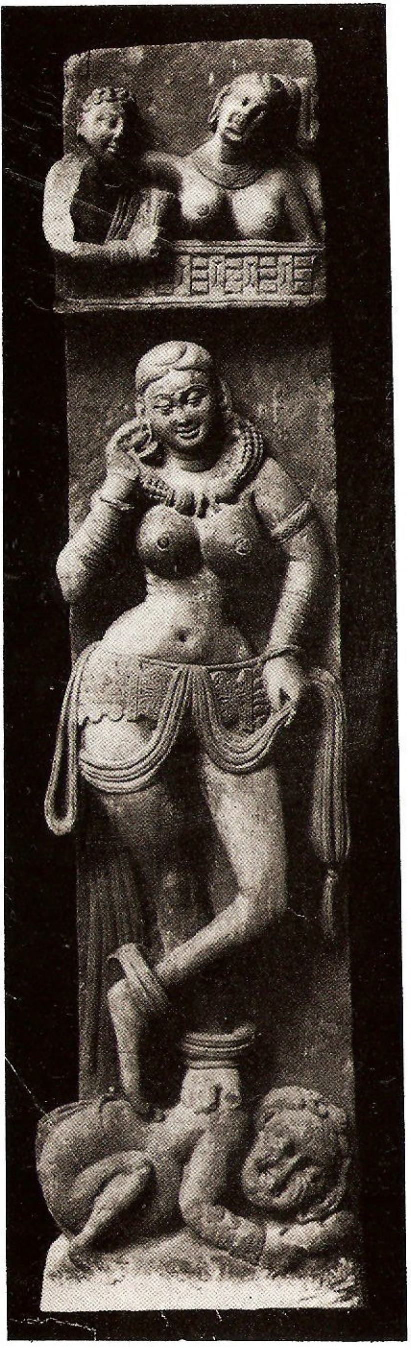


Plate 14



Plate 15



Plate 16

surging plastic mass that seems to be wrestling itself from the rock which imprisons it. There is an inherent quality of unbounded expansiveness in the theme of these reliefs that brooks no limit of any regular frame and carries itself as far as the rock allows.

Bedsā

The rockcut architecture belonging to early group reached its fulfilment in the two beautiful examples at Bedsā and Kārle. The specimen from Bedsā (about 1st Century B.C. – A.D.) earlier and simpler of the two, still retains the rigorously plain interior with octagonal pillars and wooden attachment in the form of beams and rafters. For the first time a high *verandah* or portico was introduced in it. This *verandah* with its boldly carved colonnade, speaking a large aesthetic vision of the master sculptor, lends a unique character to the edifice. The pillars and pilasters, two each, have large *Ghaṭa*-bases, each resting on a pedestal of four graduated tiers and octagonal shafts. Each one of these in turn is crowned by a bell-shaped fluted lotus, over which is an *āmalaka* within a square frame supporting a corbelled abacus. On this abacus kneel in repose addorsed animals in pairs (Horses, elephant and single bull) with riders—man and woman. Each pillar has two such pairs, one facing outwords and the other inwards, while the pilasters have only one facing the pillars. Figures, both human and animal are remarkable for their plastic treatment. The dignified bearing of the strong, stately and self-assured man on the pilasters, in effective juxtaposition to the squattish figures, betraying conscious amorous sugggestions, is superb.

Koṇḍane

Similarly few sculptural representations have also been found from the cave of Koṇḍane. The facade of this cave is

richer, both in execution and well-balanced arrangements of different parts. Further, the figures of men and women with bewitching bodily movement—some in a group of two or three in amorous dalliance—within compartments, separated by a *jāli*-pattern above the lowest projected railing, display decided advance over the figures of Bhājā or the works of Bhārhut and of Sāñcī in the plastic treatment and evince an animated style and maturer art. The delicately modelled figures are shown in natural poses, their movements are free and full of expression and grace. This seems to indicate for these reliefs and also the cave (unless the reliefs are regarded as later additions—a supposition for which there is no sufficient justification), a date not earlier than the 1st century B.C. The marked stylistic difference cannot be entirely due to the genius of the particular sculptor responsible for the work[1].

The figures carved in high relief below this frieze have all disappeared. On the left side is a fragment of sculpture in *alto-relievo,* part of the head of a single figure about twice life-size. Though the features have been destroyed, the details of the head-dress show the artist's attempt to furnish minute details. There is a short record, in characters of the first century B.C., by its side, recording its execution.

Pitalkhorā

The Buddhist caves of Pitalkhorā are excavaed into the rock of the Sātamālā range, 50 miles to the West-South-West of Ajaṇṭā and 23 miles North-West of Ellorā. The caves of Pitalkhorā lay on an ancient caravan route of the Sātavāhanas. Out of 13 caves, Nos. 3, 4, 6 and 9 are datable back to 2nd century to 1st century B.C.

The crowning glories of Pitalkhorā are cave 3 and 4, both conceived and executed on a magnificent scale, the

exuberance and the rich texture of their facade decorations are unparallelled in the pre-christian caves. The series of sculptures stylistically, with those characterised by an archaic naivete, (*e.g.* Gajalakṣmī and Yakṣas) which form the earliest sculptures in western India, and gradually gathers elaboration sophistication (*e.g.* seated female figures), still it reaches a full development that is almost comparable with that of Amarāvatī. The figures of 'Dwarf-*Yakṣas*' with their hand and head as if supporting the balastrade, having pot-belly and wrinkled forehead, bulging eyes and eroad and flat noses bring out their humorous character. (Fig - 4 c)

The panel of elephants of cave 4 with their massive and rather stiff forelegs, are shown as stepping forward out of a shelf cut below the floor of the cave and appear to bear the weight of the cave. The elephant-sculptures have their proto type in their Mauryān counter part at Dhaulī in Orissa and appear to have influenced the later artists.

The *Dvārapālas*, clad in *Dhoti*, hold a Javelin in one hand and a shield in the other. They are remarkable for their very realistic modelling, their faces show bulging and fleshy cheeks, thick lips and wide open eyes. The ponderous chests, the heavy and muscular arms and the firm standing poses give the figure the perfect demeanour of an alert sentinel. Their head-dress, formed by the knot of the turban decorated with pearl stringed males, reminds one of similar head-dress depicted at Sāñchī and later on at Amarāvatī.

Moreover '*Dwarf-Yakṣa*' representing a standing corpulent male with its hands raised upwards to hold a shallow bowl is comparable with the squatting *Yakṣa* from Maholi, Mathurā and one on the western gateway of Sāñci[2]. (Fig. 4).

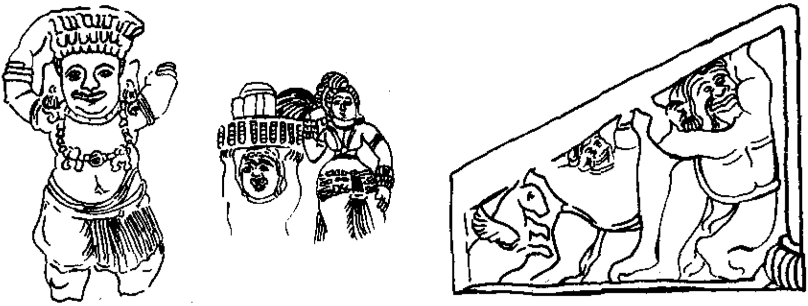


FIG 4

The figure of *Gaja-Lakṣmī,* flying *Gandharvas* or *Vidyādharas*, Musicians, Mahouts, *Mithuna* couples, Royal couples, are the best representatives of Pitalkhorā sculptural art. The great departure of Buddha is another interesting piece where, in the background the *Toraṇa,* the vertical ones of which have a pronounced inward rake. The three arches have rounded and curbed-up-ends. It would be worthwhile to compare this *toraṇa* with the other one depicted on an early painting in cave 10 of Ajantā (1st - 2nd century B.C.) and in both the cases the inward rake is quite pronounced.

In a similar way in the *Caitya* halls of Kārle (1st century A.D.), Nāsik etc., also we find some beautiful sculptures which were supposed to be the representative traits of the then period.

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CHAPTER 5

KUṢĀṆA ART (1ST TO 3RD CENTURY A.D.)

The rise and growth of the Kuṣāṇas as a political power (1st century A.D. to 3rd Century A.D.) coincided with some *great religious and cultural ferments in the country.* Though Buddhism was still the predominant religion, the passage of time had dulled the enthusiasm of the Buddhists for the monasticism, implied in the earlier ideal of passionless search for truth. It no longer remained a code of ethics, but became a popular religious system. The Hindu psychological truth that the human impulse craves for something concrete through which to adore for salvation rather than to explore the void metaphysical subtleties prevailed at last. The belief in a God who could be visualised in the likeness of living things created the first great schism within the Buddhist movement and was responsible for the establishment of the rival Mahāyāna and Hinayāna school. In Mahāyānism Gautama, the Buddha was elevated from his position of a teacher to that of God and came to be regarded as the embodiment or incarnation of a principle. Buddhism thus became theistic and

sanctioned the worship of the great teacher as the manifestation of infinite light. Kaniṣka, as the royal supporter and patron of Mahāyānism, holds as great position as Aśoka had held with regard to Hīnayānism.

In art, these changes were reflected firstly in the creation of an iconography peopled by the various Bodhisattvas and the Buddha. Artistically, while previously Buddha's presence was indicated by symbols only, the seated or the standing Buddha with varying *Yogic-Mudrās* now began to capture the imagination of the artist. He was conceived as the *Mahā-Puruṣa* (great person or superman) and *Cakravartī* (universal Emperor or world-teacher). Thirty two major signs were recommended in *Śilpaśāstra* for super human perfection which included the protuberances or '*Uṣnīṣa*', the 'Ūrṇa' or tuft of hair between the eye-brows, the mark of the wheel, *triśūla* etc. on the palm and soles. In the initial stages, however the master represented is only the idealised vision of the various artists and not the standardised individual. Standardisation came afterwards, but a general agreement with regard to dress, poses and appearance had definitely begun to manifest itself.

Another innovation in the art was a departure from Bhārhut and Sāñcī-traditions in the method of relief narrative, instead of depicting the separate episodes of the story with the framework of a single panel, the artist now began to illustrate them in a sequence of panels. But the reliefs are of minor importance in this period. The artistic urge of the time expressed itself in increased plastic penetration of large-sized sculptures, boldly carved in the round or high relief and with greater vitality.

The two important centres of artistic production under the Kuṣāṇas—Gandhāra and Mathurā—represent two

completely distinct categories, while Mathurā continues to grow in the traditions of the indigenous schools, Gandhāra employed a distinctly foreign technique.

Mathurā

During the first three centuries of the christian era, Mathurā filled almost the whole picture in the realm of artistic activity in North-Eastern India under the great Kuṣāṇa emperors Kaṇiṣka, Vāsiṣka, Huviṣka and Vāsudeva, who were munificent patrons of the Buddhist faith and took pride in raising stupendous monuments for the edification of their cherished religion. Mathurā became the most prolific center for making of sculptures and images which were exported and supplied to distant centers like Sāñcī, Sārnāth, Kauśāmbī, Śrāvastī, Pāñjāb, Bairāṭ in Rājasthan and Beṅgal. The Sculptors of Mathurā worked on a special variety of spotted red sandstone which was quarried at Sikari, Rupbas and other places in the adjoining area. Here Buddhism, Brāhmaṇism and Jainism had their respective centres and places of pilgrimage and naturally all three of them inspired their own sculptures, images and architectural *stūpas* or shrines. Fortunately, not less than five thousand of these ancient relics have been found at Mathurā, and a majority of them belong to Kuṣāṇa period[1]. In art, and in religion, the prevailing note was harmony and amity, not dissension or discord The genius of the Kuṣāṇa artists comprehended the problem rightly and rendered a good account of themselves by producing most splendid and beautiful specimen of the *Bodhisattva*, the *Buddha, Vishṇu, Śurya, Śiva, Jina, Kubera, Yakṣas, Nāgas* and their female counterpart[2].

It appears from the very large number of Mathurā-relics of the Kuṣāṇa period that the artists had a considrable scope

before them. Not only did they carve out extensively the statues, belonging to different religious movements but also dwelt upon various interesting secular subjects. It appears that the sculptors wanted to display the entire panorama of life in its varied colours. They touched upon many a vital points concerning human life and thought. To them this world, with all its delight and sorrow, with its natural beauty and grandeur was much more than the other world which was only imaginary. In the relics that have come down to us, we find this idea boldly portrayed.

The early statues of *Buddha* and *Bodhisattva* in the Mathurā art represent their forms carved in the round. They are usually colossal in size and are shown either standing or seated in the meditation posture (*dhyānamudrā*). *Bodhisattva* is depicted in the princely form wearing various ornaments, such as crown, torque, waist-band and armlets. Buddha on the other hand is without these worldly signs and is shown wearing only the upper and lower garments. The head of Buddha shows the lump of hair (*uṣṇīṣa*) which is indicative of his enlightenment, on the forehead is shown '*urṇa*'.

The massive earthiness and robustness of form and volume as noticed in earlier representation of colossal *Bodhisattva* figure as found at Sārnātha and Sāhet Māhet, both dedicated by Friar Bala (Pl. - 15) were the precursors of Buddhas images in similar posture. A gradual development in chronology as well as style are to be found in *Katra-Bodhisattva* (Pl. - 16), where the heavy and massive form become relaxed in course of time and grows supple and pliable with a gliding linear contour and with smooth and sub-merged shadows playing all over surface. At least 4 various postures (*mudrās*) found exhibited in the

Buddha and *Bodhisattva* statues of Mathurā *i.e. dhyāna* (meditation), *abhaya* (protection), bhūmisparśa (touching the earth) and *dharma-Çakra* (turning the wheel of law).

In Mathurā-sculpture one can see Buddha's birth at Lumbinī, his enlightenment at Bodhgayā, turning the wheel at Sārnāth, besides a large number of *Jātaka* scenes like *Kacchapa-Jātaka, Ulūka Jātaka, Vessantaro Jātaka, Roṃaka* and *Sutasoma Jātaka* etc.

Side by side, the statues of the Jaina *Tīrthaṅkaras* were found from Kaṅkālī Ṭīlā, they are shown either in the standing or seated posture. We also sometimes find them shown in the centre of the square or rectangular tablets of homage, called *āyagapāṭṭās.* These tablets also portray beautiful female figures in attractive poses. Most of them are inscribed.

The remains of ancient Buddhist and Jaina *stūpas* in Mathurā have been found in plenty. these include railing pillars, cross-bars, coping-stones, doorjambs etc. Among these the railing-pillars occupy a unique place in the art of India. They are important for the study of various phases of the social life in Kuṣāṇa period. Most of the pillars depict women in joyful moods. Female beauty is the strong point of the Mathurā sculptures as illustrated by the standing figures of *Śālabhañjikā.* The women wear a number of ornaments. They are engaged in various pastimes and garden and water sports (*udyāna-salila-krīḍā*) and shown as enjoying a free life under the open sky and sun shine. Besides these, we find the depiction of birds, animals, floral and creeper designs in the most naturalistic and tasteful manner. (Pl. - 17).

In the Mathurā art we often meet with the *Yakṣas, Kinnaras, Gandharvas, Suparṇas* and *Apsarās* engaged in

various delicate acts like music, dance and drinking, sometimes they are shown by way of ornamentation but generally associated with divine figures. The *kinnaras* are shown half-human and half-horse. The *gandharvas* as expert in music, *apsarās* in Dance. The *Suparṇas* are shown with wings. The *vidyādharas* are generally shown in couples showering flowers.

Like the *Yakṣā*-worship, the worship of *Nāgas* and *Nāgīs* was also fairly popular in ancient Mathurā. Nāga-worship was prevalent both in the snake-form and human-form. One lifesize statue in the Mathurā Museum hailed from Cārgāon which stands in a spirited attitude with the right hand raised above is most remarkable. The head is surmounted by seven hoods. The Mathurā artists were aware of the contemporary Gandhāra art-tradition of the North-West and certain Buddha figures and reliefs give indication of this awareness. There is still controversy about the origin of Bacchanalian Scenes (drink and inebriation). Similar is the case with 'Heracles and the lion'. Composition of these motifs did not survive in subsequent Indian art. "They are just passing fancies which might have touched the imagination of the Mathurā artists, and are off very little import to the history of Indian art as a whole"[3].

Mathurā has also yielded several unique statues of the Śaka-Kuṣāṇa rulers *e.g.* Wima Kadphises, Kaṇiṣka, Chasṭana. All these are clad in their typical northern dress. The statue of Kaṇiṣka (Pl. - 18) represents an extremely linear and angular conception in which the figure though free, is entirely set into the surface and is frontal in the most rigorous sense of the term. Other two statues represent the central Asian or Seythian in inspiration (Pl. - 19).

The vast reportaire of the Mathurā school may be recognised to be a natural and consistent growth of early Indian art with its foundations on Indian soil and on indigenous trends and traditions of the closing centuries of the pre-christian era.

The terracota figurines of Mathurā are no less important for an appraisal of the socio-cultural trends of the age under review. They contain various features of common interest with their lithic counterparts.

The Kuṣāṇa-art of Mathurā in its variety and richness opens before us a vista of beauty which looks always fresh to the eyes and to the mind.

Gandhāra School

The earliest mention of the Gandhāra region is available in the Behistun inscription of Darius (516 B.C.) when the land formed part of the Achaemenian Empire. The territory is next referred to during the conquest of the Persian Empire in 321 B.C. by Alexander the Great. It was situated close to the North-Western gates of India, the territory lay exposed to foreign contracts and influences from time immemorial. Due to it's situation on the great trade-routes between Europe and Asia, this region witnessed the confluence of several streams of culture. As a result the style of art that emerged was distinct and unique. The Gandhāra sculptural art has such a distinctive look that it can easily be set apart from all other Indian types.

The spread of Indian religions among foreign people is an interesting study, and it is through the influence of such religions as Buddhism and Bhāgavatism etc., that the foreigners were gradually Indianised and absorbed in the vast current of Indian population. The Gandhāra school of

art was devoted to the service of Indian religions, but mainly following an extraneous and electric art-tradition, represents really a stage and process of this Indianisation and has to be viewed in that light.

The Gandhāra school of art is best known because its most prolific productions and important remains have come from Jalalabad, Hadda and Bamiyan in Afganisthan, the Swat Vally, Taxila, Takhti-Bahi in the Yusubzai country, Bala Hissar, Charsada, Palath-Dheri, Ghaz-Dhe etc. The material employed is usually a dark gray slate stone in the early period and Stucco and Terracotta are the favorite mediums in the late.

With very few exceptions, the sculptors of this school devoted themselves for illustrating the Buddha legend. *Jātaka* stories were still represented, but much more common were representations of the Buddha and the *Bodhisattvas.* It is in fact claimed for the Gandhār Sculptors that they were the first to establish the type and form of the anthropo-morphic form of Buddha. Independent images of Buddha either seated or standing occur very frequently, but he may also be seen in human form as the central figure of historical compositions. A study of the image artists have followed the Indian traditions of iconographical formulae. They have rendered their Buddha in the likeness of the divine figures of the Greco-Roman Pantheon. Briefly the imported elements are the hallow, hair arranged in wavy curls straight profile, classic cut of the eyes, the curve of the lips, and supple and deep folds of the garment arranged in the fashion of Romān Toga. The image of the standing Buddha form Takt-i-Bahi in the frontier region bears an unmistakable resemblance to the Greek-Apollo type in the execution of the head and pose, and with the Roman statue of Augustus in the rendering of the drapery. The same

Greco-Roman elements can be observed in the representations of the seated Buddha with legs crossed in characteristic *yoga* posture. The *Bodhisattava* type is represented as prince Siddhârtha—a young man in princely attire wearing turban, jewellery and a muslin robe (*Bodhisattvas* from Sahri-Bahlol and Takht-i-Bahi). Many Buddha and *Bodhisattva* figures have also been given moustaches. The relief compositions adorning the *stūpas* and monasteries and narrating stories, mainly from the life of the Buddha or from the legends of his earlier incarnation, illustrate the same mixing of realistic methods of Roman craftsmanship and the conceptual point of view of Indian tradition as that seen in the independent statues.[4] (Pls. - 20, 21)

Gandhāra art thus came into being during the period of Śaka domination. The art of the minor Greek states of which specimen are as yet wanting except on coins, was a strongly coloured Hellenism, and this under the Śaka and Kuṣāṇa patrons assumed a local character in the service of Indian religions, particularly Buddhism. The spell of Hellenism, felt in the earlier production, gradually became less manifest and a chematisation in the second century A.D. lead to a degeneration of the earlier artistic forces.

From the 3rd century onwards a revival of artistic tendencies of the 1st century A.D. appears in view. Stone sculptures became rare, both in quality as well as in quantity, Stucco and Terracotta of easier tractability are the favorite materials of this period. The style is much more free than the schematic productions of the second century A.D. The drapery, again, is progressively of the transparent gossamer type and in the body treatment, the harmony of rhythmic lines as we feel in the earlier productions but much softened down, is more in evidence. In the attitude of

the figures, the same tendency to relax is noticed again. The two significant centres of this late phase of Gandhāra art are Mohra Moradu and Jaulian.

The Gandhāran representations of the Buddha, patterned on the humanistic classic forms of western art failed however, to interpret the perceptions of Indian Buddhism and contributed but little to the sum-total of formal and aesthetic achievements in the field of Buddhist sculpture. Quite obviously the character of this art was much too foreign to express the inner meaning of the Buddha image. It was, therefore, left to the artists of the Gupta period, when the national genius of the country was more fully expressed than at any other time in history to suggest the spiritual quality of the enlightened one by truly Indian ideas.

In the fabric of Indian art as a whole the Gandhāra school occupies nothing more than that of a mere passing phase. But it has to be admitted that this phase of Indian art was not without its contributions. The main value of its productions lies more in the field of iconography than in aesthetics. It increased the illustrative material of Buddhist myths and legends and helped in evolving the icon of the Buddha to which it gave its own stamp. This eclectic art is an eastward expansion of Hellenism, as transformed by strong Iranian and Scythian elements and applied to Indian subjects. From the Indian point of view it is an westward expansion of Indian culture in a foreign and eclectic grab. As Dr. Kramrisch eloquently observes, "Gandhāra...... occupies a position apart. For, if it is Indian and colonial from a Hellenistic point of view, it is Hellenistic and colonial when viewed from India"[5]. Gandhāra art virtually came to an end with the invasion of the Hūṇas in the 5th century A.D.

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CHAPTER 6

CONTEMPORARY ART OF SOUTH INDIA

Amarāvatī

The earliest specimen of sculptural art from the Kṛiṣṇā-Godāvarī delta, known in ancient times as Veṅgī, hail from Jaggayyapeṭā and Amarāvatī. Here the human forms are much more tall and slender, the reliefs are slightly rounder and the modeling fuller and more delicate. On the whole, men, animals and vegetation are more elastic and treated more elegantly than in the north.

There is no doubt that the Veṇgī region carries on the tradition of early Indian art, and serves as a link between the earlier art of Bhārhut, Bodhgayā and Sāñcī on the one hand and the later Gupta and Pallava art on the other[1].

Of all the Buddhist sites in Andhra, Amarāvatī is by for the most magnificent as also widely known[2]. It is situated a little over 20 miles from Guntur. A richly decorated *stūpa* locally known as *Dipaladinne* or hillock or lamp consisting of a very extensive series of sculptures, the full story of the artistic achievement for which pre-eminence is claimed (Pl. - 22).

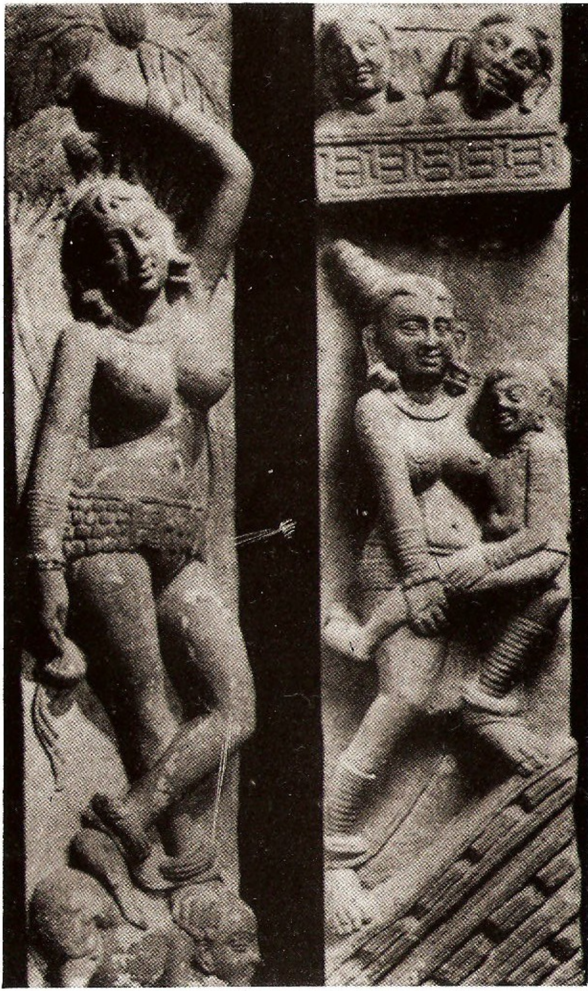


Plate 17



Plate 18



Plate 19



Plate 20



Plate 21

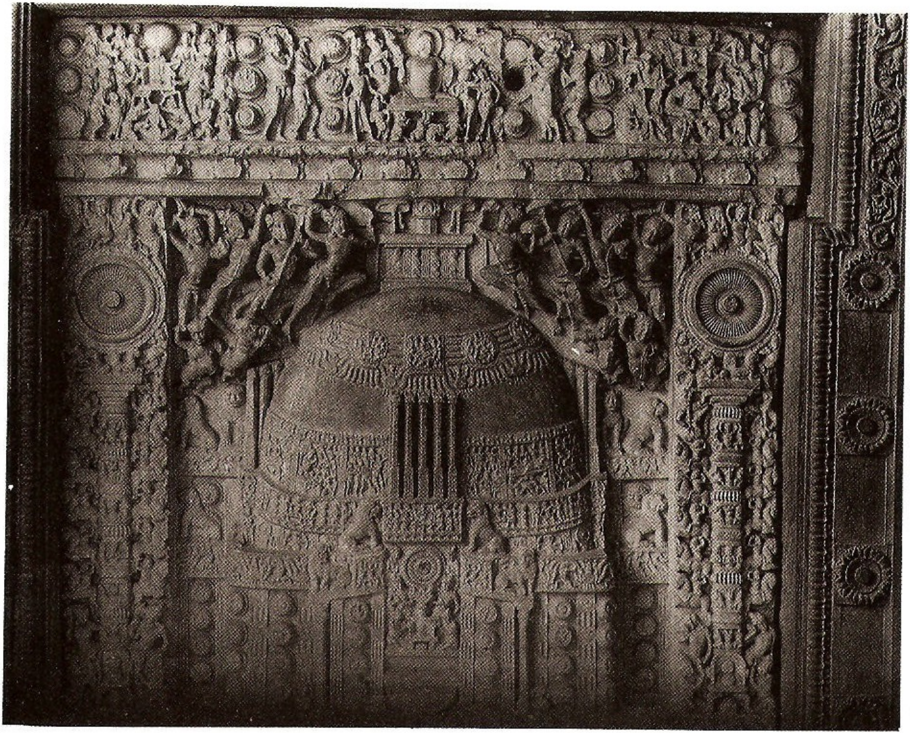


Plate 22



Plate 23



Plate 24

The subject matter of the Amarāvatī sculpture and of those from the Kṛiṣṇā-Godāvarī valley of this period was no doubt intended to be religious. Their purpose was to feed and stimulate the faith of the devotee by a visual presentation of the legends of Buddhism. But it is significant, how religion was being used as a pretext for the purpose of singing a wildly enthusiastic, rapturous paean of worldly life. It is not primarily the narration of an edifying tale, nor the portrayal of a life of renunciation, nor even the representation of the permanent values of life which one witnessed at Bhārhut, Bodhgayā, Sāñcī, Bhājā and elsewhere, rather, it is frankly naturalistic and even sensuous; an innocent and spontaneous joy and the most pagan love of life pervade the entire world unfolded before our eyes. The female from of the *yakṣnīs*, the *vṛikṣakas* and the dancing girls have been rendered with infinite love and grace, their full busts, heavy hips and their living flesh have all been touched with a saturating sensuousness.

In the relief from Veṅgī, nature recedes to the background, it still serves its symbolic purpose, but is no more to be seen in its fertile abundance. The main interest passes on to the human figure itself. Scene after scene, teams with tall and slender human figures; they are everywhere in abundance, in all poses and attitude, in action and movement, in case and relaxation, in high tension and elegant languor, sitting, standing, bending, flying, dancing, hanging, hovering—always exhibiting sturdy but delicately modelled bodies with heavy heaving shoulders borne on a pair of slender supple legs, all definite in their precise but exuberant outline and characterised by an amazing elasticity of movement.

Yet the mature art of Veṅgī is neither simple and spontaneous naturalism of Sāñcī nor the unabashed

lewdness of Mathurā. The sensuousness of Veṅgī is much more refined, elegant and sophisticated, lifted to a subtler plane, which is not due to a complete mastery of an advanced technique *i.e.* the relief matures in depth whence the figures seem to emerge and achieve the full roundness of form in the process and becoming overacting and foreshortening, already evident at Bodhgayā, Orissa and Sāñcī have also attained the fullest maturity and are exploited to the utmost. The modelling, too, has grown to full maturity in plasticity and naturalism it is subtler, more delicate and more sensitive than that of even Mathurā of the 1st century A.D. But a most important advance in technique lies in the treatment of the relative weight of the different parts of the body, by the subtler process of balance and equilibrium. In the words of Dr. A. Coomarswami—"It would be hardly possible to exaggerate the luxurious beauty or the technical proficiency of the Amarāvatī reliefs, this is the most voluptuous and the most delicate flower of Indian sculpture". Like all great arts, the art of Amarāvatī is national rather than provincial in character and effect. There is a great similarity between the art of Amarāvatī with that of Bhārhut in the early phase and Nāsik and Kānheṛi in the later phase[3].

The compositions here are mostly in circular frames, beautifully balanced, and are filled with a great vitality and sense of rapid movement which rises sometimes to a sort of frenzy, and at times is highly dwarfish in character. These carvings executed with ivory like delicacy and great precision, are among the most refined specimens of Indian sculpture.

One of the coping stones of the *vedikā* in the Madras museum, is represented by an interesting historic scene, the disposal of the relics of the Buddha. After the death and

cremation ceremonies, the Mallas of Kuśīnagara wanted to keep for themselves all his remains to the great discontentment of the neighbouring rulers. But on the advice of the Doṇa, they were ready to share them with the others. The composition is first divided into two parts, with the city gateway set across in the middle on the right side on the lower part the funeral dance is shown. The upper right scene represents the Mallas refusing to give the relics and the upper left the division of the relics into eight parts. On the left half of the composition seven elephants leaving city gateway with small relic-casket on their heads. The carving shows the lower part of the gate-house and wall in brick and upper in wood with barrel roof, horse-hoe shaped window etc.

Another composition in the Madras museum highly dramatic in character, is the subdueing of the mad elephant Nalagiri (Pl. - 23) which Devadatta let loose in order to kill the Buddha. Two episodes of the story are shown in this medallion, on the left, the elephant is attacking the terror stricken people. He is trampling one unfortunate victim under foot, while gripping the legs of another in his trunk. On the right, the subdued elephant is prostrating before the Buddha.

The art of the Kṛiṣṇā-Godāvarī valley manifests its greatness in one more direction. For the first time, Indian art becomes conscious of psychological states and learns to find appropriate expressions for the powerful emotions of the human heart, mainly through the facial lineament. This quality has lent a highly dramatic element to the scenes.

Technically, the Amarāvatī reliefs have a more complex, composition than anything seen hitherto. Using the Bhārhut and Sāñcī device of continuous narration, the compositions

here are organised as patterns of dynamic movement, knit together in a supremely fluent rhythm by a most sensitive and easy manipulation of chisel. The mastery of technique on the part of the artists is further revealed by their ingenious arrangement of figures and setting in a number of planes, the confident handling of fore-shortening and the clever rendering of the attenuated beauty of the figures within a sure and decisive outline, certainly for more plastic achievement. Amarāvatī reliefs have seldom been excelled anywhere.

Nāgārjunakoṇḍa

Of the successors of the Sātavāhana, who carried on traditions of their masters, particularly in the patronage of Buddhism, the Ikṣvākus were the most famous. The inscriptions discovered at Jaggāyyapeṭā and Nāgārjunakoṇḍa supply us four names of the Ikṣvāku family who ruled at Śrī-Parvata (Nāgārjunakoṇḍā area). The period of the Ikṣvākus, though short-lived dynasty is very significant in the History of Buddhism. It was during their period that many *stūpas* and *vihāras* were either built or renovated. Nāgārjunakoṇḍā, although lacking the rich sculptural decorations of Amarāvatī, stands today as the best monument of the epoch when the Ikṣvākus were ruling Andhra in 2nd-3rd century A.D. In this phase of art the sculptor sometimes achieved great success, but sometimes some of the figures did not come up so high. This is the phase when sculptural art at its peak shifted from Amarāvatī to Nāgārjunakoṇḍā for its intensive expression (Pl. - 24).

The sculptures of the Ikṣvākus are not materially different from those of the later Sātavāhanas. Though the Ikṣvāku monarchs were not themselves followers of the

Buddhist faith, the monuments at Nāgārjunakoṇḍā are an eloquent testimony to the tolerance of the royal sense whose munificence had helped the efforescence of a great artistic movement at Śrī-Parvata. Familiar scenes in Amarāvatī are repeated here at Nāgārjunakoṇḍā and some times even in almost identical pose of arrangement of figures and group. Mostly common themes of the *Jātakas* are repeated: Buddha visiting Yaśodharā and Rāhula, *Māndhāta-Jātaka, Sara-Jātaka* etc. Some new theme and fresh theme unknown from elsewhere in India, are found in carvings from the Kṛiṣṇā Valley, among which those from Nāgārjunakoṇḍā rank high.

The carvings of the Ikṣvāku period from Nāgārjunakoṇḍā Ghaṇṭasala, and Goli have great artistic merit. The running boy pulling a toy- horse on wheels, the *mithunas* between panels, the *Yakṣī-Vṛikṣaka* at ends of long rows of panels from Nāgārjunakoṇḍā the temptation scene from Ghaṇṭasala and the magnificent pales depicting vessantara's story at Goli, as also that of *Chhaddanta* are examples of the fine works in the realm of the Ikṣvākus.

While in Amarāvatī some figures are drapped in Greek fashion; in Nāgārjunakoṇḍā Scythian influence is noticed and the cap and coat of a soldier on a pillar may be cited as an example[4]. *Vajrapāṇi* in Nāgārjunakoṇḍā carries not a three pronged *vajra* as in Amarāvatī, but a bone-shaped *Vajra* similar to the one in Gandhāra Sculpture. Influences from Ceylon known through inscriptions at Nāgārjunakoṇḍā are evident in the lovely moon-stones with rows of animals, most beautifully carved.

Between the sculptures from Jaggayapeṭā and those of the 1st period from Amarāvatī there is not much of difference in date though stylistically the former is said to

belong to a slightly earlier date. Hence the fragments of sculptures from Jaggayapeṭā are the earliest specimen of the art of south-Indian.

The sculptures found at the excavation by Dr. Dubreieḷl in 1926 from the remains at Goli have a close relationship to more of the last period of Amrāvatī which is commonly assigned to 3rd century A.D.

Indeed the age of Amarāvatī and Nāgārjunakoṇḍā is the golden age of Indian art and its luster would remain imperishable as long as even a broken piece of their wonderful friezes is left to beckon us to a just society, that is free from caste and cruelty and to a new world that is above hate and strife.

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CHAPTER 7

ART OF THE PERIOD

Terracotta

Terracotta was the material for artistic expression of the humble people. Earth or clay has been regarded as the primeval plastic material, not only because of its ready availability but also on account of its easy tractability. It, thus satisfies the creative impulse of the ordinary man, as much for aesthetic expression as for domestic and ritualistic needs. Terracotta has thus served as an easy and convenient plastic material from time immemorial. Plastic practices in India appear to have begun with the Terracotta figurines of the peasant culture of Kulli and jhob and abundant production is also encountered in the urban culture of the Harappans phase[1].

The clay figurines of the historical period although separated from those of the Indus valley by an interval of about twenty centuries, show links of styles and subject-matter[2]. A large number and variety of finds have been made on various levels of excavations at a number of important city sites, such as Pāṭaliputra, Buxar, Taxilā, Mathurā, Ahichhatra, Vaiśālī, Kauśāmbī, Rājghāṭ

(Banaras)? Bāngarh and Māhāsthān (North Bengal). These are found in the from of objects of house hold worship and decoration, plaques and figures in the round for popular magic and religious purpose, seals, childrens' toys, ornaments, medals, animal figurines etc. which are of great value for a comparative study of our culture at different periods.

What is further interesting is the fact that the primitive type has been found in association with the other, and that Terracotta objects of the primitive type are also being fashioned out by the rural people even in the present day. Hence Dr. Kramrisch aescribes this type as the "ageless in distinction to the second which is designated as the timed variation".

Historical or time bound terracottas of pre-Gupta date appear to be those in which the faces are bound to be impressed from moulds, with the hair, head-dress, and even the ears separately, made and added to bodies modelled by hand. The use of moulds appear for the first time in the late Maurya or early Śuṅga period about the third-second century B.C. Definitely datable Maurya material is yet scanty, its main reason being the absence of accurately recorded excavations. However, clay figurines from the Paṭnā site like Paṭnā city, Bulandi Bāgh, Kumrāhār, Buxar etc. may be ascribed to the Maurya age. Stylistically there are several distinct types which must have preceded in time the known types of the Śuṅga period. The most remarkable are those unearthed in the excavation at Pāṭaliputra consisting mainly of a type of female figure with elaborate head-dress and panniered skirt somewhat over-sized and spread out on the two sides of the legs like wings (Fig. 2b, 3). A remarkable specimen comes from the Paṭnā museum. The laughint head of a boy in Paṭnā museum is another

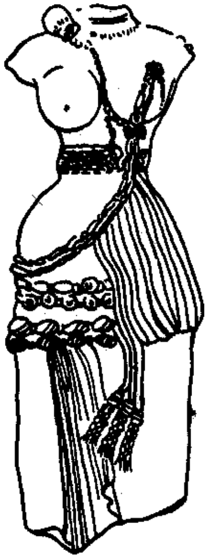


FIG 2(a)



FIG 2(b)

remarkable evidence of the terracotta art of the Mauryas (Pl. - 25). Mention may be made of another remarkable figure found in the Gorkahpura at Paṭnā. This female torso, in its pose, plastic modelling of the body and rich ornamentation, approximates the Didārgañj-*Yakṣī* type. It is profusely decorated with moulded ornaments though the bust and torso appear to have been first modelled by hand. The figure, assignable to Circa 200 B.C., is a beautiful specimen of the early Indian terracotta art (Fig. 2a).





The terracotta female head found at Sārnāth is the true representation of indigenous art tradition. Regarding this Bachofer opined, "The fine features and the graceful pose of the neck with head slightly inclined towards the right show that it must have been modelled at a time when Mauryan art was at its zenith".

In some of the terracottas of the period foreign elements are also to be found *e.g.* one found at Basārh and the other at Sārnāth. Bachofer rightly observed: "at Sārnāth and Basārh small terracotta have been dug up which belong to the Mauryan period and are undoubtedly to be graced back to Graeco-Bactrian artist".

The terracotta human figurines fall into two divisions-religious and secular, is quite evident from a stylistic study of these figures majority of the religious figurines are female which shows that there was a wide-spread cult of female fertility figures—classed as (i) Mother Goddesses type and (ii) *Yakṣiṇī* type. Mother Goddesses types are all mutilated but following characteristics are common to all these example; (1) The absolute nudity (2) the determinately emphasised sex-organ; (3) the presence of the girdle round the body, a little above the sex organ; (4) developed breasts and (5) Full blown lotus under the feet, specially one figure, and the peculiarty divine stamp. The *Yakṣiṇī* figures found at the Mauryan level have also the fundamental similarity with the specifically known *Yakṣiṇī* images of the Mauryan age found at Didārgañj and Besnagar and of the Śuṅga age found especially at Sāñcī, Bodhgayā and Bhārhut. Thus we can hold that there was a cult of *Yakṣiṇī* prevalent in the Maurya age.

It is well known that this female figurine having nude body does not fall within the scope of Buddhism. Regarding this important point Coomarswami has very aptly remarked, "Early Indian Art, generally is realistic, *i.e.* without arriere pensee or idealistisation. The main interest is neither spiritual nor ethical, but altogether directed to human life.... The art of these reliefs expresses a philosophy older than the great enlightenment...."

The terracotta human figurines fall into two divisions viz. religious and secular is quite evident from a stylistic study; of these figures majority are religious.

It is equally clear that their content is not religious, in the sense that Indian art at a later period becomes religious; "the intrinsic quality of early art is realistic and sensuous.... It is religious in the very sense of ancient cults of Mother Goddesses and fertility—spirits, not in the sense of the great enlightenment.... The art of Sāñcī is not, as art, created or inspired by Buddhism but is early Indian art adopted to edifying end and there with retaining its own intrinsic qualities"[3]. Anyone who studied the specimen of Mauryan sculpture cannot but be impressed by the fact that in this age two different types of figures—one following the tradition of the soil and the other greatly influenced by the Perso-Hellenistic influenes exist. It cannot be possibly denied that the Didārgañja and Besnager *Yakṣiṇī* figures and many terracotta figurines of the indigenous type certainly supply the material for the modelling of figures sculptures of the artists of the Śuṅga age who created the sculptures of Bhārhuta, Sāñcī and Bodhgayā.

We notice a remarkable development in the terracotta art of the Śuṅgas. A large number of sites found in the Gangetic basin and all the places produced a large number

of terracotta figurines *i.e.* Ahickṣeatra, Kauśāmbī, Rājghāta, Tamluk, Candraketugarh, Pāṭliputra etc. They are found in the form of miniature plaque, each bearing figures in relief, entirely produced from moulds and then touched up and finished before firing. In this series too it is the female figurines that predominate. Such plaques have come up from various ancient sites of India in a fairly abundant number, and a large proportion of them may be placed in Śuṅga-Kāṇva period, roughly 2nd and 1st century B.C. They are shown in high reliefs, the forms more refined and more sensitively modelled, the lines more disciplined, and the contours and gradation of planes better regulated. As a rule the figures are heavily coiffured and wear elaborate apparel and jewellery concealing, to a certain extent, the loveliness of the delicately modelled body. The types are considerably varied, and in the prolific terracottas of this group with their varied modes of caffer, dress and jewellery one may find ample materials for a study of the fashions and tastes of the time. These elaborately decorated plaques consisting of female figurines are popularly known as Śuṅga-*Yakṣī* (Pl. - 26). Their faces are either oral, round, elongated or parabolic. Like the face, the eyes are also treated in different ways. The ears are probably hidden behind the ear-rings. The nose and face is also very naturalistically modelled. The breasts are modelled in a naturalistic way having spontaneous development out of the flesh of the body. If we study these figurines then the one important point which becomes apparent is that the dynamic element is the most important characteristic of these figurines.

Mostly these *Yakṣīs* are shown wrapped by a diaphaneous drapery, stamped ornamented designs, consisting of flora and fauna motifs along with usual types of ornaments *viz.* ear-rings, necklaces, girdle, bracelets and

anklets, but special attention has been paid to make sex-organ visible[4]. There are various kinds of head-dresses worn by these figurines. Special mention should be made to head dresses of the *Yakṣī* which resembles weapons clipped in the coffiour. The lowest one is *aṅkuśa*, middle one axe, *Triśūla, Vajra,* and the top emblem might be a flag or *Dhvaja.*[5] Emblem of this types are frequently referred to in literature, though often difficult to identify. Dr. C.C. Dasgupta in his book entitled 'Origin and Evolution of Indian clay Sculpture' has described these female figurines into three broad heads: *i.e.* a) Divine mother—Orīsis type, b) Parsonified *Yoni* or Bauho type, c) Divine Woman or Ishtar type.

A large number of *Mithuna* figures also hailed from the notable sites like Ahickṣehatra, Candraketu Garh, Kauśāmbī, Pāṭliputra etc. They are shown either standing side by side, or embracing each other. The *Mithuna* or man and woman type was borrowed somewhat later by..... designated as the *Dampati* or 'Husband and wife' type in the plaques from Ahichhatra (Pl. - 27).

In Kuṣṇa art, emphasis on sculpture was mounting to the decrease of terracotta art. This is reflected in the comparative paucity of terracotta specimens in this period, both at Mathurā and Ahichhatra, whereas at Kośāṁ the art of clay figurines almost died out. Only in a very limited number of specimen the earlier traditions of fine workmanship continued, and the majority of the Kuṣāṇa figurines exhibit a crude style. In the Śaka-Kuṣāṇa period various ethnic types and fashions are represented in terracotta art, a clear reflection of the racial influx that was characteristic of the period. Mathurā and Taxilā represent two prolific centres of this art, while Ahichhatra,

Kauśāmbī, Bhiṭā, Rājghāṭa, Vaiśālī, Bāṇagarha, etc. have each supplied conspicuous objects.

Terracotta with a definitely Śaka-Kuṣāṇa stylistic impress exhibit a great variety of ethnic types and nomad fashions, especially conspicuous in the male figures from Mathurā, which must have been due to the influx of new racial types and new fashions and tastes. Faces of femle figures are characterised by either a smile or atleast an animation noticeable on the cheek-bones set below a pair of flat wide-open eyes. Musicians with a great variety of instruments appear for the first time during this period, many of them distinguished by their long noses. Horsemen and riders holding reins along with a large number of toy cart like ram, bull, generally in moulded figures, are also seen for the first time.

A superbly modelled terracotta head from Mathurā with a radiant smile of joyous existence illustrates the worldy attitude of the art, as in the plastic style in stone of this period. The terracotta plaque from Rājghāṭa with the figure of a hermaphrodite accompanied by an animal reveals, again a similar attitude in its sensuous physical form. On the whole, both in variety and in design, in sturdiness of form and differentiated modelling, the terracotta of the Kuṣāṇa period, found in excavation at Pāṭaliputra, Ahichhatra and Mathurā, provide a rich wealth of material for the study of contemporary art form and design. This can well be supplemented for the Deccan and the South, recently unearthed from Māski in Hyderabad and Koṇḍāpura, Amarāvatī, Nāgārjunakoṇḍa etc.

The figurines of Māski from Konḍāpura are made of Kaolin, a soft grained clay of white colour. They are usually made hollow pressed out of two or more moulds,

subsequently joined together and fired. Some of them were pointed. The human figures show a large variety, mostly comprising of beautiful heads with curly hair or wearing elaborate turban with foliated knots on one side as seen in the Amarāvatī and Nāgārjunakoṇḍa sculpture (Pl. - 28). The female heads are still more charming and varied, revealing a high degree of skill in the making of moulds, a keen sense of realism and artistic effect. Besides human figures there was also found a considerable group of animal figurines, including lion, bull, horse, ram, dog etc. with the advent of the Gupta period. Fresh artistic activity bloomed forth at many centres in North India causing a wholesale revival of terracotta art.

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3. C.C. Dasgupta—*Origin and Evolution of Indian Clay Sculpture*, p. 151.
4. C.C. Dasgupta—*Indian Clay Sculpture*, p. 169.
5. S.K. Saraswati—*Survey of Indian Sculpture.*



Plate 25



Plate 26



Plate 27



Plate 28

EPILOGUE

The period under review is important in many respects. During this period different elements of Indian culture converged and formed a crystallized whole. It was an age of the revival of the sculptural art.

Stylistically speaking, the prevalent art form of India during this millenium flourished in ancient *Madhyadeśa*, Orissa, Central India, the Veṅgī country, further south and regions of western Ghāṭas and the Deccan. But the pivotal importance of the main stylistic stream originated in *Madhyadeśa*. Naturally the stylistic pattern of purely Indian character flourished in these areas. Example of this style of archaic character and loveliness found expression in early sculptures of this region. In central India this is most beautifully depicted in the *stūpas* railings and gateways of Bharhuta and Sāñcī. It continued through the primitive *Yakṣa* and *Yakṣiṇī* images of Mathurā, Paṭnā and adjoining regions. The true Indian style was missing and again expressed itself through the famous *Yakṣiṇīs* of the Mathurā railing pillars. The continuity of Indian art style can be seen also through its exquisite terracottas.

The naturalness of Indian forms expressed itself in the art of the peripheral regions of Indian sub-continent. Of these, Amarāvatī and Nāgārjunakoṇḍa are most famous and stylistically most accomplished. In a sense, the early art of Orissa as depicted on the face of the rock caves bears testimony of a stylistic link between the art of northern India and the art of Veṅgī and further south. In Deccan and western India we come across the same preference for modelling and dress as found in the *Madhyadeśa*, of course, influenced by its own local idioms.

The question of foreign influence is a complicated one. True art is never an imitation. Natural influence of outside elements is successful only when day to day life of the people adopt some foreign ways and means of living. Adoption of foreign ways of living by Indians are few and far-between, on the contrary adoption of Indian way of life by foreigners are numerous as evident by the Indo-Greeks, Śakas, Pārthians, Kuṣāṇas adopting not only Indian religion but Indian names also. It must be remembered that whatever foreign elements are seen in Indian art do not originate from the popular feelings of the common man starting from the age of imperial Mauryas to the artistic creations of the Kuṣāṇas and post-Kuṣāṇa period. We find that sculptures of deep and effective foreign influence are those which are patronized directly by the ruling hierarchy. Consequently the so-called Mauryan columns show artistic echo of Achemenian art. But the beautiful group of elephants decorating the entrance of the Lomaśa Ṛiṣi cave or the Dhauli elephant or the Teracotta dancers or the Laughing Boy etc. hardly show any foreign influence.

What is true of Mauryan period is also valid during the age of Śuṅgas and Kuṣāṇas. The primitive *Yakṣa* group, the

smiling *Yakṣiṇās* of Mathurā or the *Dvārapālas* and animated scenes from *Rāṇī-Gumphā* etc. from Udayagiri and Khaṇḍagiri are independent of any foreign dominations, what is true in respect of stone is also true in respect of terracottas of the plains of north India and Deccan. It must be remembered repeatedly that terracotta art represented the most deep rooted and wide spread feelings of the people. However, it does not altogether mean that foreign impact is totally absent. They can be traced but in meagre proportions.

During the age of the Kuṣāṇas and rulers immediately following them, the question of foreign influence confined itself in minor Arts and certain foreign motifs were also adopted like Honey suckle, Merlon, winged animals, coinage, caskets, cameos etc. The sculptural example embodying foreign influence mainly relate to royal portraiture and in some cases in Indianized representation of deities like the Sun God, some foreign garb, directly patronized by the ruling oligrachy. But the vigorosness of the Indian art expresses itself in numerous sculptures of Mathurā discussed earlier.

The time has to question the truth about mediterranean influence in the early sculptural art of south India. Archaeological evidence now points to the fact that the *stūpa*-panel of the south are more related to the so-called Bāsavadattā Panel and other scenes of Udyagiri and Khaṇḍagiri. The beautiful delineation, the elongated modelling as found in the south first expressed itself under the benevolent rule of the *Meghavāhanas* who ruled quite a portion of south-eastern India.

A time has come to revaluate the artistic importance and origin of the Buddha image. Impartially speaking, it seems

that it was a case of amalgamation between the artistic ideals of India and the more outward and superficial expression of western Asia and countries further west.

There is an enormous scope of work for evaluating the real history and artistic importance of sculptural art between 3rd century B.C. and 3rd century A.D. In one respect we should endeavour to build up a social history of art whereby the social position of the artist and the nature of artistic patronage are compared with artistic ideals of different period. A serious study should also be made to ascertain whether the subsequent Eastern and Western stylistic style of sculptures in India during the Gupta period have any past historical background. A deeper study is also warranted for comprehending the development and diffusion of Indian art of peripheral regions during the period under discussion.

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INDEX